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THE FLUTE OF PAN
A ROMANCE

THE FLUTE OF PAN

A ROMANCE

BY

JOHN OLIVER HOBBES



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INTRODUCTION

A FRIEND of mine, who holds a distinguished position at one of the foreign courts, keeps, in his sombre bureau at the War Office, a beautiful miniature statuette of the god Pan. The exquisite ornament seemed more than ordinarily striking in such grim surroundings, and I begged my friend to tell me its history. It was a gift, he informed me, from the hereditary princess of a country which I must call Siguria. Then, as he was well aware of my psychological interests, he proceeded to tell me a tale which pleased me so much that I made it into a romance, and also into a comedy. There are things in the romance which are omitted from the comedy, and there are things in the comedy which are omitted from the romance, and each must be regarded as a work quite independent of the other. An artist may paint any number of views of the same object, and a writer is allowed the same liberty. Thus, little essays are worked out into long histories, an anecdote may

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grow into a drama, and one passage from a biography may easily become an epic in many volumes. The letters, and journals, and documents,—placed by my friend at my disposal,—the actual facts of the story, have been as little tampered with as possible, and although I hope that no one will attempt to penetrate the necessary disguise of the characters represented, I also hope that no one will question the intrinsic truthfulness of the narrative as set down.

The tale is mainly a love-tale, and it is notoriously difficult to ascertain what conversations really pass between lovers. • Either they do not remember what they say, or they do not know what they say, or—which is likely enough—they do not choose to take the world into their confidence. In this instance, however, I submitted my dialogue to the principal speakers, and they agreed, separately, and, to the best of my knowledge, without any secret understanding, that although they possibly said more than I have attributed to them, they did not say less.

J. O. H.

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" Her heart is but o'ercharged ; she will recover :
I have too much believed my own suspicion.

" Bards of Passion and of Mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth !
Have ye souls in heaven too,
Double-liv'd in regions new ?

On the earth ye live again ;
And the souls ye left behind you
Teach us, here, the way to find you,
Where your other souls are joying,
Never slumber'd, never cloying.
Here, your earth-born souls still speak
To mortals, of their little week ;
Of their sorrows and delights."

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CHAPTER

A MOTHER REMOVES AN EYELASH FROM HER EYE

BORIS, Viscount Berkele, fifteenth Earl of Feldershey, having refused to enjoy the advantages of his title and possessions, took some canvases and one hundred pounds to Venice, where he hired three rooms in an old palace, and established a small school of art. He accepted no money for his lectures, and, although a certain number of the curious went immediately to hear what he had to say, he was considered a person of talent but insufficient reasoning power. The inheritor, in a direct line, of one of the few old English peerages (created 1491), a soldier who had won great distinction during the South African war, the owner of large means inherited from an American grand-

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mother, why should he suddenly adopt a line of conduct which the normal deplored as mad, and the hypocritical praised as rather fine, and the cynical dismissed as an intolerable pose?

"He attitudinizes; he is a charlatan; he is playing to the gallery." There was little left to add except the conclusion that he was actually dangerous. Those who despise artificial privileges do not attract those who make artificial privileges worth while: Berkele, by his scornful renunciation of rank and wealth, cast a slight but distinct slur upon the two finest securities in the market, and the sensible majority who have laboured, and labour, under heavy difficulties, to keep such things immune from the profanity of the disillusioned, determined to treat Berkele as a fanatic, and, probably, an atheist. He had also molested a Prime Minister by asking him, at a dinner-party, whether he had ever read one of Tolstoy's works. "I don't think I intend to read Tolstoy," was the politician's temperate reply.

Women liked Berkele because he was known to have been susceptible to beauty once, and to have led an amorous life as a Guardsman before the war. Rumour had associated his name with that of the prettiest princess in Europe—an exceedingly at-

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tractive, dashing, imprudent, brilliant princess, who broke hearts and disregarded etiquette merely because she wanted to enjoy herself. She lived for pleasure. Women, who heard the story, expected, with the sentimental optimism of their sex, that the love-lorn Feldershey would marry eventually some dear, darling girl, and modify his reactionary ideas. He had now reached the moment in a man's career—between the ages of thirty-five and forty—when he shows his mettle, and takes the step, in some secret or open way, which leads to his ultimate place among the weak or the strong—a truer division of humanity than the ordinary distinctions which classify them as the good and the bad, or the rich and the poor, or the happy and the unhappy. Many of the rich are good and happy, many of the poor are bad and strong; many of the rich are strong and wretched, many of the poor are weak and happy: the play on these conditions is as various as the combinations of notes in the musical scale, but strong or weak one must be. To this fact Berkele was awake, and when his mother, Lady Feldershey, arrived full of tears, protests, and gifts in his bare studio overlooking the lagoon a few days before his thirty-seventh birthday, he owned that he had reached a crisis, no doubt, although he felt as he

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had been feeling for a considerable time, and he could not pretend to see two yards in front of his nose—so far as his future was concerned.

"You are quite good-looking enough for a man, and your smile was always charming," said Lady Feldershey, answering a malicious jibe which she had received in London with regard to the reformation which is apt to accompany a ruined appearance or shattered health.

This was the jibe—

"If St. Ignatius had not been wounded at Pampeluna, should we have heard so much about the Jesuits? If only the beautiful and contented and young were allowed to sit in judgment, what different verdicts we should get on social sinners!"

Lady Feldershey repeated this—not to annoy her son, but to warn him of the dreadfully intelligent among his critics.

"You were not wounded, and you are not plain," she continued; "why, then, do you have these extraordinary notions, and live in this hole? People will soon say that there must be something wrong. They are bound to say it. When I think of the magnificent career you have abandoned, it is enough to kill me! When the King asked me at Ascot where you

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were and what you were doing, I nearly sank into the ground! His look! my confusion!"

She was interrupted by the arrival of his pupils—a mixed rabble, as she described them afterwards, of American, German, English, and French persons of both sexes. Some stood; some sat on the floor; some listened eagerly; while the rest, because the lectures were free, paid no attention to the lecturer's remarks, but stared at each other, at him, and at Lady Feldershey. Her ladyship could make nothing of Berkele's address, which seemed to her quite preposterous and an enormous mistake.

"What is it all about?" thought his mother; "I wish he wouldn't."

Suddenly her attention was arrested by a rosy German woman about forty-two, who had taken an arm-chair as though it belonged to her, and was stitching at some needlework as though it was her habit to sew in the studio. Once Lady Feldershey caught the stranger's eyes—which were as blue as a Cloisonné vase and curiously mild.

At the end of an hour the audience dispersed. The German lady remained behind, and was presented by Berkele to Lady Feldershey as the Frau von Sender.

"Your son," said the Frau, "will have me here as a

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chaperon. He is dreadfully nervous with innocent young ladies who love art."

Lady Feldershey gave her a glance of unrestrained suspicion, but the eyes of Cloisonné blue remained constant.

"Lord Feldershey is a great genius," observed the Frau.

"Well," said Lady Feldershey, in a resigned tone, "I suppose one mustn't quarrel with Providence."

"And so kind with it all—such a heart!"

"You are the first lady who has accused him for many years of having a heart," said Lady Feldershey,—"except for his mother," she added.

The Frau von Sender smiled once more and took her departure, while Lady Feldershey, with a sigh of relief, sank into a chair and looked her son up and down as though he were a life-size object in a museum.

"Now," she said, "I hope you see the folly of your extraordinary notions. They are very beautiful upon paper, but they won't wash! And they are inconsistent."

The young man, who was wondering how he could spend the rest of his day, replied with petulance—

"What is inconsistency to me? The world is ruled

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by moods—by moods, my dear mother. Don't talk to me now."

"My dear boy, if I don't talk now, I shall never get a moment with you. I've come all the way to Venice in order to talk to you. You have put me off the whole morning, but I will have my say. One reason why you left society was because you could no longer meet the Princess Margaret there. People go into society to meet the people whom they wish to meet; if they don't meet them, they call it hollow! And I have remained a widow all these years entirely for your sake."

Feldershey was touched.

"Dear creature," said he, "why have you been so unselfish?"

"Because I am not full of rash and wild ideas. I have nothing except a sense of duty."

"Do you think me selfish?" said Feldershey, walking about the room.

"My poor child," said his mother, "you are an egoist of the first water! The moment the world got on your nerves you left it. You may call it Tolstoy; I call it temper. You have always wanted to be out of the way and original. You are like no one else in the family."

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"I have always been conscious of that," said he, turning pale with annoyance.

Lady Feldershey pretended to remove an eyelash from her eye, and that silence, which the serene attribute to the passing of some invisible angel, entered the studio.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH A RECLUSE IS GLAD TO SEE A FRIEND

FELDERSHEY was over thirty when he first began to paint, and his vocation came as suddenly to him as it came to Corot, who at the same age left a draper's shop in order to study nature. But whereas Corot was the son of a successful milliner and a prosperous tradesman, from whom he inherited patient diligence, Feldershey chafed under instruction, and had no industry. The hard-and-fastness of his will, however, made him seem persevering when he was merely obstinate; he toiled at the craft of his art because he would not be beaten by tasks, no matter how irksome, which younger men had conquered. At last, his pictures were exhibited in official exhibitions: at thirty-seven, he was made a Knight of the Legion of Honour. Corot, it is true, produced masterpieces for nearly thirty years before he received the same tribute, but he had genius, and belonged to the burgess class, while Feldershey had talent only, and was a

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personage in fashionable society everywhere. It was considered that his inclusion among the Knights gave tone to the whole Legion of Honour; that he conferred more than he received, in accepting any formal acknowledgment of his artistic success. A distinction, therefore, which might have helped the greater man by smoothing his way with picture-dealers, meant nothing at all to Feldershey. This is one reason why it was given to him, and also one reason why he despised what are called the world's prizes. He did not think himself mediocre, but he had sense enough to know that an honour which he could share with Corot was too loose to fit either of them properly. He painted well, nevertheless: he had a charming imagination; a great deal of feeling, which led him into dangers; a kind heart, which delivered him from much evil; a bad temper, which made his relations with men and women frequently difficult. Animals he could beat and the inanimate he could smash, but human beings, because they required more subtle treatment, disturbed his nerves. Although his friends liked him, they were not wholly devoted to him. He was cold to his equals, and he acknowledged no man his superior—except in intellect,—a thing he did not covet. He was always at his best with subordinates

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and servants, whom he could command or ignore or commend—without fear of committing himself to any fixed policy; for he had a jealous dread of compromising his right to change his mind and manner twenty times a day—if he so chose. Such a temperament does not make for happiness either in itself or in its surroundings. If Feldershey had found any pleasure in his egoism, it would have been unpardonable; but he took no pleasure in it, and therefore he was forgiven. It was clear to the thoughtful that he disliked most people because he really disliked himself. If a man cannot love himself, whom he can justify as a rule, how can he love the stranger, whom he does not understand in the least? The first notes in a man's harmonious relations with the universe must be struck in unison with his own soul and his own conscience. Feldershey, with discord in his being, could hear nothing melodious in the world. There were days and nights when he asked himself: "What is the matter with me?" and there were moments when he caught a kind of answer: "Selfishness." For a week, after hearing such an answer, he would perform acts of Quixotic self-sacrifice: cross his own will at every turn; thwart perversely every inclination; call on bores; smile upon the plain;

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show courtesies to his relations, the aged and infirm : in other words, put himself to every inconvenience as much as possible against the grain. For a week he could persevere in this course, but the relapse was as inevitable as the effort. He would say, "I'm afraid I'm not steadfast." He would feel a degree of shame at his insincerity, but he accepted it. "After all," he would think, "nearly everybody is insincere ; why make such a fuss because one is shallow?" Had he been wholly shallow, he would not, of course, have known it. This fact, too, helped the thoughtful to consider him with tolerance and hope.

On the day of his mother's arrival in Venice, he was unusually dissatisfied with his new scheme of living. It had not quite answered. He could not rid himself of the feeling that it was as artificial as the frankly insincere existence which had bored him to such an excessive pitch in London.

"Ce n'est pas ça, du tout," he kept murmuring to himself, "ce n'est pas ça."

He had no desire to rejoin the set he had renounced in scorn, but he could not tell himself that his present circumstances were right. Meditations were bad for him, because he had never been trained to think : he could feel and he could take action, but thought on a

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prolonged scale never failed to produce an unavailing melancholy in his mind. To-day his mood was interrupted by a confident ring at his studio bell. He had not been so delighted for weeks at the prospect of seeing a caller of any kind. He flung back the door, and, on observing there an extremely smart, well-groomed young Englishman of about seven-and-twenty in yachting clothes, he shouted at the top of his lungs—

“Hullo, Baverstock! What a surprise! What in the world brings you to Venice?”

Mr. Baverstock, overwhelmed by the unexpected warmth of his reception, flushed boyishly with pleasure, and thought within himself—

“People never do Feldershey justice. He is full of heart really, if you once break the ice.”

“I’m here with my yacht,” said he, “all by myself. I’m getting to like solitude—that kind of thing. Never been here before; it’s not half bad.”

“What about your business?” said Feldershey, who at the sight of Baverstock suddenly remembered the usual English amusements of the rich.

“The business,” said Baverstock, “has been turned into a Company. I’ve amalgamated my father’s jam business with my uncle’s pickles. There was always

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a rivalry. When I think how the governor worked all through his youth, and how my uncle toiled and moiled, I'm full of gratitude to 'em. I am, really."

"It's enough to bring the tears to anyone's eyes," said Feldershey ironically.

Harry Baverstock had his own ideas of courtesy, and he returned Feldershey's compliments by asking him, with a genuine sort of interest, what he was painting. Feldershey glanced tenderly toward a picture which stood upon an easel in a corner of the vast, bleak studio.

"I call it," said he, "'The Flute of Pan.'"

Baverstock marched up to the work, and stood in front of it with his legs apart and his hands behind his back as though he were watching a cricket match.

"That's rather decent," said he, at last. "I'm not much of a judge of art myself, but I'll buy that as soon as you want to get rid of it. What does it mean?"

"Pan was a heathen god," said Feldershey, "who could guide lost travellers and calm all storms by the magic of his flute. I am showing him leading some pilgrims who have lost their way. They hear him piping, and are encouraged. It is a parable of modern

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life. We torment ourselves with boredom and scruples, whereas all we need is more music, more joy! We must listen to the *Flute of Pan*. It is always playing, but we drown it with our wretched babble of philosophies, the noise of machinery, the turmoil of money-making."

Baverstock held his own forehead—

"Where was it I heard that you had taken up with the Tolstoy ideas? But don't explain them now, dear old chap. And you really live on ten shillings a week—including gas?" he added, as he observed Feldershey placing a kettle on a gas stove. "It is awfully interesting to meet a chap who has really done that, you know. I respect it myself—wouldn't do it for anything, but I think it is fine—no flattery, either. I believe you're genuine over it. I wonder how long you will keep it up."

"The gods may think I am enjoying my renunciation too much. Tell me what you have been doing all this time."

Baverstock became self-conscious; pulled down his waistcoat; bent his head a little on one side to inhale the scent of the carnation in his buttonhole.

"I went for a big shoot in Siguria. It was very jolly—a lot of nice tame bears—that sort of thing

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—met some nice people—got in with the royalties. I'm not a snob, but you may say what you like, you get a run for your money if you are in that set."

"I used to know the Princess Margaret," said Feldershey; "I knew her when she was a child. She was an exile in England then, and lived with her mother—the late princess—at one of my father's places—Berkele Abbey."

"I remember hearing about that. Your father lent them the place for the autumn, and they sat tight in it for nine years."

Feldershey left his picture and sat down on the models' pedestal, which he used as a platform during his lectures.

"The little princess and I played croquet together," he said; "in fact, we played croquet till the dynasty was restored."

"And didn't you see the princess after that?" asked Baverstock, who had heard from others a good deal of gossip on the subject of Feldershey's unfortunate and unsuitable attachment.

"She and I were very good friends," said Feldershey.

"Then why didn't you marry her? Earls and dukes used to marry royalties—they were in the

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running, anyhow. It was very good business. After all, ain't you half royal? Didn't that classy old grandmother of yours catch a royal grand duke? Ain't you a prince yourself in Russia, sir?—Prince Bolkonsky!”

“What does that matter to Margaret? I wish she had been the daughter of a washerwoman. If I could find the ideal daughter of the ideal washerwoman, I'd marry to-morrow. This, as man to man. And now tell me about Margaret's old stepfather, Prince Adolf.”

“Didn't you know that he was in Venice?”

“I hear nothing in my workshop.”

“The princess is here too.”

Feldershey gave a violent start.

“She is here incognito, for the rest,” continued Baverstock. “She has taken three floors at Danielli's. No palaces for her—she wants a little comfort.”

“So she is in Venice,” said Feldershey, and he thought he understood why he had been feeling strangely restless all that morning. He fell into a reverie from which he was roused by Baverstock's voice declaring—

“I have said it three times: I say, I've come to ask a favour.”

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"Of course," said Feldershey, still lost,

"Will you lend me your studio for half an hour this afternoon? Someone I want to see. I can't call at her place, because she is hemmed in on every side. She can't come to my hotel, and we really want some serious conversation."

"Husband in Venice?" said Feldershey drily, but interested in spite of himself.

His friend blushed and avoided his eye.

"It is for a farewell interview, you see."

"Oh, a farewell—then you've seen someone you like better!"

"You used to say much cleverer things than that!"

"It takes a farewell interview to make a man really epigrammatic!"

"Well," said Baverstock, moving away, absorbed in his own thoughts, "it isn't so much a farewell as a clear understanding"—

"About the future or the past?"

"No, don't chaff. It's a tragic thing, really, and I knew you were good-natured, and—as a matter of fact—I told her to come here."

"Oh, you told her to come—at what time?"

"Well, she is generally late"—

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"Generally!" said Feldershey, raising his eyebrows.
"Oh, these good-byes!"

Baverstock still showed a marked embarrassment. He made several false starts, till he blurted out—

"There's another favour I want to ask. Would you mind—letting her in?"

"Not in the least."

"The fact is, it wouldn't do if the servants recognised her. She—is rather well known. I can't say more without seeming to give her away."

Feldershey, who was still young enough to enjoy an adventure, exclaimed—

"Consider it settled. I will let her in."

"I don't like to suggest that you should put on your servant's clothes, but do you think you could manage an Arab effect and pretend not to know any European language? It would put her at her ease at once."

Feldershey opened a casone which stood by the window and drew out several pieces of drapery.

"Here is a rig I bought in Palestine. I wore it at a ball in Cairo, and not a soul recognised me."

"The very thing," said Baverstock.

But Feldershey's enthusiasm, which always had

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a childish quality, began to wane. His thoughts drifted back to the Princess Margaret at the Hotel Danielli. Could he call? Should he call? Was it his duty to call? He would be an ass to call—an abject, poor creature to move his head in the direction of the Hotel Danielli!

“Although this is awfully amusing,” said he aloud, “why don’t you let your lady in yourself?”

“In order to disarm suspicion,” said Baverstock, in his best manner, “I am going to show myself going in a contrary direction after she has started. One has to display common prudence. See? If I say any more you’ll be guessing who it is.”

The bell tinkled. Feldershey did not move.

“That’s the bell,” said Baverstock, unnecessarily.

“People who ring once are either bores or bills,” replied the artist. “I have a little system. Agreeable acquaintances are told to ring twice; if I am not occupied, I see them; otherwise, I do not. But those few who may always enter ring three times. For the rest, you know the old saying: from six in the morning till eight at night, by the door; and from eight at night till six in the morning, by the window!”

The bell was pulled more violently, and his lordship peeped through the grille.

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"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "here is a coincidence! It is old Prince Adolf!" and he drew back the bolt without noticing his companion's look of annoyance.

"Your Royal Highness," said Feldershey, bowing low to his new visitor, "how delighted I am to see you! I was thinking of you this very day. I hope you are well."

"You know I am always ailing," said Prince Adolf. He added a hope that he was not driving Mr. Baverstock away, and he gazed severely at the young man.

"Thanks, no, sir," said Baverstock. "I have an appointment"; and he disappeared with as much dignity as he could assume.

The prince had a military appearance, but he walked listlessly, felt his own pulse, showed no interest in anything, held his heart from time to time, fell in a kind of collapse into the chair which Feldershey offered him, and drew out his handkerchief and bit it. He was perfectly dressed; his tie matched his socks, his clothes fitted to perfection, his beautiful grey hair was brushed with great care, his hands were very white, he was graceful and languid in all his movements. With a shrewd artistic eye he surveyed Lord

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Feldershey, the poverty of the apartment, and the picture on the easel.

"What brings you to Venice at this time of year, sir?" asked Lord Feldershey.

"Well," said Prince Adolf, "every ten years or so Parliament considers the advisability of establishing a republic. The princess always seizes such an occasion for a well-deserved holiday. She goes to Venice or Paris, sees her friends, amuses herself generally. When her enjoyment is at its height, we are invariably entreated to return by our devoted and faithful subjects. We forgive them—they pay our travelling expenses—and we return amidst the acclamations of an enraptured populace. That's the way to govern modern politicians. Let them try each other as rulers. They soon thirst for a constitutional monarchy!"

Feldershey thought him mistaken, but said—

"I hope you are right."

"Seriously," said the prince, "there is a great commotion in Siguria. The hill men threaten an insurrection. It is bound to come. Margaret ought to marry. I wish you would tell her so."

"I tell her so!"

"Of course. You are, in my opinion, the very man

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to tell her so. She knows you despise the world, and she knows you hate politics. You are all for ideals and art and so forth. So is Margaret up to a certain point. That is why she muddles everything. Margaret is a delightful woman, but a damned bad statesman!"

"There I agree. That is why I have given up reading newspapers. Sigurian affairs always crop up on the second page."

"Then urge her duty upon her. She wants to see your picture—'The Flute of Pan'—of which she has heard so much. And it is understood that you will be asked to paint her portrait for the State Gallery."

"I could never be a court painter," said Feldershey proudly; "for I know too much about courts in the first place, and, perhaps, a little too much about painting in the other."

"That is a touch of your usual ungraciousness," said Prince Adolf. "If you had gone to Eton, it would have been swished out of you. Forgive an old friend."

"And do you mean to say," said Feldershey, ignoring the reprimand and gazing earnestly at the prince, "that Margaret remembers me?"

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"Remember you! By Jove, my dear fellow, she has been talking about you ever since she got here. When she heard you were in Venice, she clapped her hands like this"—and he attempted to imitate her action. "She wishes to come here this afternoon at five o'clock."

Feldershey conquered his emotion with a certain pleasure and a certain annoyance. He moved restlessly about the studio, seemed on the point of speaking, and checked himself several times.

"But why come here? Would she be interested? It isn't a fit place for her. I've left her world—and yours—I have really."

"She often says," said Prince Adolf, "that of all her friends you are the one who planned an ideal and stuck to it. She respects you. After all, your views have much to recommend them. A great position is oftener than not a tremendous bore. I know that as well as you do. A lot of places are a bore—sitting tight is often a bore! In choosing an artist's life, you chose a life of freedom. You can love whom you please, as you please. You can amuse yourself as you please."

"But haven't you," said Feldershey, "even in your position, always amused yourself as you pleased?"

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"But you can always know that you are loved for yourself alone, and then you don't compromise anybody. The fact is, I have compromised far too many women. I must pull up! I never mean to compromise them—but—one drifts—one loses one's self in a pair of blue eyes. And then—someone else finds one! Such a bore! Ah, there is much to be said for your view. I think you will find Margaret sympathetic. And she is softened."

"But you flatter me if you think she will listen to my advice. It is only the prudent who will take an idea."

"She isn't prudent—she never was—but she is impulsive. The art of managing her is to suggest the right impulse at the psychological moment. Now I will bring her round at five o'clock."

"And I had made up my mind not to see her again. She led me such a dance in the old days."

"I should be grateful to anyone who could make me dance!" replied the old dandy. "Now I will go back to Margaret. I'll tell her everything is arranged. *Au revoir!* And don't forget to tell her she must marry. Rub it in."

"But marry whom? Who is the man?"

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Adolf looked at him curiously, pursed up his lips, and put a hand upon his shoulder.

"I thought you two used to get on very well. I have a picture before me of one of those books in large print—handsomely bound—called *A Royal Love Match*, or something of the kind. Can't you see it?—the home life—encouragement of art and literature—the refined court circle? Think—and *au revoir!*"

After he had gone, Feldershey went to the mirror, and, by the aid of a hand-glass, examined the pate of his own head in the fear that he was becoming prematurely bald.

CHAPTER III

WHICH DESCRIBES A RENDEZVOUS

"It was a great pity that I did not love Lord Feldershey," said the Princess Margaret to her favourite lady-in-waiting, the Baroness D'Albreuse; "there was always something about him which made me anxious to go the other way when I saw him coming! It was a curious instinct."

"Very singular, ma'am."

"And I am almost ashamed to say that I actually wished him to know I didn't love him. That wasn't nice of me. I might have been gentler. My troubles have improved my character, Mopsle: I look back, and I condemn myself for many things. I have been greatly to blame—if not altogether in the wrong."

"How, ma'am?" The baroness was incredulous.

Margaret lifted her eyebrows.

"How? In my treatment of Lord Feldershey. Of course, he wouldn't stand it."

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"But it was kinder to him, after all, ma'am, to show him that he had nothing to hope for!"

The princess sighed and looked away into the distance—as though the city of Venice and her companion did not exist, and she were by herself in a dream.

"I hear he isn't happy," she said, after a long pause. "And isn't it strange that he, after six years of following his ideas, and I, after six years of following mine, should ask nothing more from the world than to sit quietly and be let alone? How we have changed! I don't know whether I want to laugh or cry at the difference. But he was so ambitious once, and I was so fond of pleasure. I wanted to enjoy every moment of life, and it had to be mad enjoyment—not the peaceful, placid absence of pain which stuffy philosophers call pleasure. By pleasure, I meant pleasure and everything that gives it—love, romance, colour, beauty, music, light, gaiety, jewels, beautiful clothes, money."

"You can always have many of these things, ma'am."

"Yes," said Margaret sadly, "many of them."

Presently she announced her intention of going to St. Mark's by herself. She liked to go out un-

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accompanied, perhaps because she could enjoy this independence on a holiday only. The baroness noticed that her royal mistress wore a long dust cloak and a heavy white lace veil—in order to avoid recognition. But even so concealed, she had a gait and bearing which were unmistakable under any disguise, and as she left the hotel, every passer-by of intelligence was aware that the small lady who walked swiftly, with the air of one who had a purpose, was the hereditary Princess of Siguria. She called a gondolier, and, in perfect Italian, directed him to take her to the first house of the second corner, after leaving the piazza on the left. In ten minutes' time they reached their destination. It was a palace which resembled, at first sight, a dozen other palaces in side canals. Her Royal Highness accepted the gondolier's assistance, stepped from the gondola on to the worn landing-steps, rang the bell, and was immediately admitted, by an Oriental servant whose unexpected appearance startled her, into a large bare room which resembled a dozen other large bare rooms. As she was neither nervous, nor given to brooding, nor observant, she entered, and thought of absolutely nothing till the bell rang twice. She motioned to the Oriental, but he touched his own ears and lips in

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a way which was evidently meant to imply that he was deaf and dumb. The bell was set pealing a third time. The princess pointed to the door, and the servant, profoundly bowing, at last understood her gestures. He opened the door, and admitted Mr. Baverstock. Mr. Baverstock neither advanced nor spoke till the Oriental had retired, then, throwing prudence to the winds, he rushed impetuously toward the princess, exclaiming—

"Darling! It's all right. That fellow's deaf and dumb. How brave of you! You're simply clinking!"

He was on the point of clasping her in his arms, when the lady, with great haughtiness, drew back, lifted her veil, and displayed a pale, indignant countenance.

"The princess!" exclaimed Baverstock, almost losing his balance. "Your Royal Highness"—

"Is that your handwriting?" she asked, holding out an envelope.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is that my name?" she asked, with sarcasm.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then why are you surprised to see me? Now I will tell you why I am here," said Margaret, in a kinder tone, having placed herself triumphantly in

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the right. "My cousin, the Countess Rixensart, in her haste to secure the mail-bag this morning, ran down the stairs, tripped, and sprained her ankle. She fainted from the pain, and the letter-bag, therefore, was brought to me. I opened it myself. I read all the letters myself? I answered them all—except one. That was addressed to me: I knew it could not be meant for me."

Baverstock, who had been showing every sign of consternation during this speech, managed to stammer out—

"Your Royal Highness"—

"Don't interrupt."

"I am sure I beg your Royal Highness's"—

Margaret waved her hand with a fine authority, which she had gained in the legitimate exercise of her autocratic position.

"How dare you send letters to a married woman and put my name on the envelope? How dare you write to Bertha and use my name as a protection?"

"If I had put her own name, and the letter had fallen into her husband's hands," said Baverstock ingenuously, "she would have been ruined!"

"And," said Margaret, "if you put my name on the envelope, and it falls into my hands—?"

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"Well, ma'am, we knew you might be angry, but you would never give her away."

"So that's your idea! I am safe!"

"Yes, ma'am; and on my word of honour as a gentleman"—

"I ask no questions," said Margaret haughtily, "because you will feel obliged, in honour as a gentleman, to tell any number of lies. I am, therefore, the one to speak."

"I have no excuse to offer. I was desperate. But the countess is in no way to blame. I just wanted to say good-bye for ever. I would sooner cut off my right hand than"—

She interrupted him at once.

"I gather from this note, in which you arrange a lonely meeting here, that your intentions, where she is concerned, are of the loftiest, most ethereal character! I stole away to St. Mark's as though I were going to church. I called the first gondola I saw. I forgot appearances, I forgot the risk and the madness of the whole thing—I am simply furious!"

"Indeed, ma'am"—said the gentleman, in despair.

"I have come in her stead because I rather wanted to see where foolish people meet foolish people. I call it very dreary and very damp."

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"If you will believe me, ma'am"—

"And to use my name—the impertinence! I open a sealed letter, and what do I read?—'Darling Precious,—I have made the record arrangement. Go to the first house of the second corner, ring the bell on the ground floor.' Wear something quiet, and trust your devoted H. B.' I went straight to Bertha's room. I said, 'Look at that!' and she fainted again. You may think you are in love with her, but of course you are not. You must tell her that you are not. Promise me," she wound up, with a charming air of entreaty, "that you will forget her, and give her up."

Baverstock, whose eyes always moistened at the spectacle of any pretty woman, under the influence of any sort of emotion, said, with real regret—

"I cannot promise. I'll do my best, your Royal Highness, but I cannot promise."

"The moment a new man appears, Bertha makes a bee-line for him. She can't help it. There is no happiness in such things."

Baverstock became tragic; a successful libertine has never a sense of humour. He must be melancholy, intensely grave, or the sex will never ruin themselves on his account.

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"It isn't happiness," he declared, with gloom, "it is what you're driven to do—bound to do, ma'am. I don't love her because she is going to make me happy, but because I must." . . .

Margaret, a true woman, responded at once to the serious note.

"Yes, that is true," she murmured sadly, and remembered swiftly all her numerous love affairs, every one of which had been pathetic to the last degree. "But I mustn't sympathise with you—I mustn't, indeed. I must do my best to prevent you meeting. You understand?"

"Absolutely, ma'am."

"And silly letter-writing is not the worst of it. What about a secret meeting in a place of this kind? Who would forgive it? Who would believe, for one moment, that it was innocent? Any married woman found here, in these circumstances, would be ruined."

"That is, I think, an extreme view, ma'am, if I may say so."

"You know better. I do these wild things, and see how I am talked about! I shock everybody, and I am not married."

All the bells of Venice rang out.

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"What time is that?" she exclaimed.

"Half-past four, ma'am," said Baverstock, looking at his watch.

"And I have an appointment at five. I must go now."

Baverstock moved gladly towards the door.

"Your Royal Highness will allow me to"—

"No, I must go alone. Somebody might see us together," said the princess. Then, as she reached the door, she touched his coat sleeve with the tip of her gloved hand. "Now, I have let you down very gently. I mean, all the same, every word I have said. Flirting with married women is like playing bezique to your partner's bridge. You are certain to get the worst of it! Now do be sensible."

"I'll try my best, ma'am," said Baverstock.

"Try hard. I can see it will be very hard. Good-bye."

Baverstock opened the door: he bowed himself nearly to the earth. The princess tripped out, and the gentleman uttered oaths after her retreating figure. Then he called aloud for Feldershey, who did not hear him for some time. He came in at last without his disguise, and dressed as usual in his Russian blouse.

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Baverstock was on the point of tears:

"You've been most awfully civil, and I can't thank you enough, but I'm dreadfully upset."

He wrung his friend's hand and dashed out, leaving Feldershey to imagine that even Mr. Baverstock's large fortune could not make a rendezvous end precisely as he wished.

"Poor devil!" thought Feldershey, and, seizing a broom, he began to sweep the floor. Was not he himself waiting for a lovely lady?

CHAPTER IV

WHICH DESCRIBES AN ENCOUNTER

FELDERSHEY resented his own undeniable agitation at the prospect of seeing Margaret, face to face, once more. He had heard, from many, of the caprices which had made her reign over the Sigurianese a flamboyant page in modern history.

Her brains, her extravagance, her audacity, and her disinclination to marriage, would have made a much older and plainer woman the special prey of all the scandalmongers. But Margaret was still young; she was considered pretty by some, handsome by others, good-looking by the least friendly. She was not a great power among the crowned heads of Europe, but no one of them came of a kinglier dynasty or governed a prouder people. They were as industrious as the Swiss, as strenuous as the Americans, and as fond of comfort as the English; they were rightly called unsettled, and the princess, in attempting to control them, was probably wise in

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keeping them amused by her charming manners rather than awed by her real genius in statesmanship. Had they suspected her ability, she would have been greatly feared and bitterly disliked: but Emperors called her intelligent at worst; kings found her charming; presidents thought her bright; Prime, and other, Ministers admired her complexion. In the engaging character of a delightful creature, a little mad, perfectly harmless, and well educated, she played her part in the politics of the world. To Feldershey, however, she was always the perverse girl, who broke his heart although she allowed him to beat her at croquet. At croquet she was inimitably inept: his victories, therefore, were never worth his while. He liked to think that she had treated him badly; that she had shown herself an unfeeling, ungrateful woman; that she had destroyed his ideals, and made a wreck of his whole life. He set his teeth, and determined to find nothing desirable nor winning in her. But he and his mother worked like slaves to get the studio in order for her visit. Lady Feldershey, during Baverstock's call, had been out to purchase draperies and skins, red chairs, small tables, new china, silver tea-things, flowers and flower vases—everything she could find

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in Venice, that could give, at short notice, to a desolate room the appearance of an English home.

"There, I have done my best," exclaimed her ladyship, as she surveyed the changed scene. "I am trying not to feel flurried. What a life! How can you like this excitement?"

"What a hole to ask anyone to," sighed her son. "What do you suppose Margaret will think of it?"

Her ladyship was too much absorbed in dusting to hear his remark.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed suddenly, stopping in front of a small statuette of the god Pan, "this is a charming thing, but what is this curious little cupboard in his back?"

"At one time," said Feldershey, "a musical clock was kept there, and every hour he played upon his flute; but that has been stolen. When I can afford it, I intend to have another made."

"What a pretty idea!"

"Yes, it is a toy. We all have our toys."

Once more the bells of Venice pealed out an hour.

"I shall never get used to these bells," said Lady Feldershey. "Is the Princess Margaret coming at five?"

"Yes," said her son.

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"But surely you're going to put on your frock-coat?"

"No; this is the moment of all others to wear my blouse!"

"I think that is very theatrical."

She thought mournfully: "How like his father! and how much more like my own grandmother—too eccentric for words."

She said, with a resigned smile—

"Please yourself, my darling boy!"

She always gave him this liberty when she saw that he was determined to take it: thus she was able to persuade herself that she could manage his humours.

The bells had barely ceased ringing when the royal party arrived: Prince Adolf and the princess, accompanied by Count Rixensart and the Baroness D'Albreuse. But Feldershey forgot all he had ever known of love, or happiness, or hospitality, when he saw the princess wearing the cloak, the hat, and the heavy white veil of Baverstock's *belle amie*. He stared; he became livid; his mouth grew parched; he seemed deprived of the powers of speech or reason. The emotion of Leontes on observing Hermione touch, in mere kindness, the hand of his own best friend, was not more fierce or outrageous

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than the madness which now entered into Feldershey's soul. Jealousy founded on reason is like everything else which is founded on reason—a matter within the reach of wisdom and justice. But the jealousy which comes from selfishness, and is dependent mainly on mere suspicion or appearances, is a disease of the mind. It must run its dreadful course, and when it does not culminate in crime, it is cured—if it be ever cured—by time or a tragedy. Feldershey was constitutionally jealous—it is the common malady of misanthropists and cynics and the disillusioned: they give it many names, yet jealousy, not of the nobler sort, it remains.

“Dear Lady Feldershey!” said Margaret, graciously offering her cheek to be kissed. Then, untying her veil and handing it to Feldershey, she said she hoped he had not forgotten her—it was such a long time since they had met. She did not recognise the studio—it was so transformed by the new furniture and decorations, and she did not know that Feldershey had opened the door for her half an hour before.

“It is such a long time since we met,” she repeated.

“Is it really so long?” asked Feldershey grimly.

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"I am afraid it is about five years ago," she faltered, much hurt by the coldness of his glance. "Have I altered so much?"

"I am wondering," he answered, and he seemed to be studying her face as though it were morbidly interesting to a physiognomist, but no longer attractive to a lover.

Count Rixensart, the Master of the Horse in Sigunia, was so much perturbed at the strange expression on Lord Feldershey's countenance, that he whispered loudly to the lady-in-waiting—

"Do you see how he stares at the princess? I have always heard that he has no manners."

"Ah, but the Berkeles are such an old family!" observed the baroness, also in a loud whisper. She thought she held the clue to the situation, because she believed that she alone in the court knew of the old flirtation between the princess and her distracted host.

Margaret, whose courage never failed, rallied from the first discomfiture of her reception, and smiled with exasperating serenity upon the angry man.

"I heard about you," said she, "from everyone. They tell me you have renounced everything except your pictures. You have given up your titles, your

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land, your money—you really follow Tolstoy's ideas. I am so interested."

Feldershey replied with emphasis that he had renounced everything—except his pictures.

"It is too extraordinary," continued Margaret, as though she were thinking irresponsibly aloud. "It isn't as though you were a failure, or you had lost your good looks. You are better-looking than you used to be! Honestly! I came to see you, but you will show me 'The Flute of Pan,' won't you?"

Prince Adolf joined them. He wished to find some excuse for leaving the two together, so, with a meaning glance at Feldershey, he asked—

"Isn't there a room in this palace where Paul Veronese once painted a lovely Venetian? As I cannot possibly see the Venetian, I should very much like to see the room."

"There is some legend of the kind. It's my kitchen now," said his lordship.

"Kitchen! What desecration! But we must see it. Dear Lady Feldershey, you must show me the kitchen," said the prince.

"Papa is always so full of romance," murmured Margaret.

"I like to people the past and live in other

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centuries than our own. What is more refreshing than a change of centuries! Now the kitchen, Lady Feldershey."

Rixensart and the baroness exchanged knowing grimaces as they followed the prince and Lady Feldershey from the room.

"Boris," said Margaret, in a confidential tone, when they were alone, "I have really come to ask your advice."

If his manner had been cold in the presence of witnesses, it was now frozen.

"That is something I could never presume to offer, ma'am."

"Oh dear!" thought Margaret, "what an appalling manner! What is the matter? What a mercy that I know him and understand him. The ice used to stop just above his heart; now even the heart is frozen within an inch or so of the depths. I must have treated him badly. What a pity!"

"But if I beg your advice," she said softly, "if I tell you I must have it—if I promise to follow it—if you give it!"

"My embarrassment will know no bounds."

"I shan't reproach you—if it doesn't pan out well! I wouldn't say one word. You know, I suppose, that

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they want me to go back? They miss me, after all, in Siguria." •

"I heard it, but I didn't believe it."

"Why didn't you believe it?"

"Why should they wish you to return, ma'am? You are more expensive than a president, and they can't get rid of you so easily."

"You are as blunt as ever," she exclaimed. "Why are you so horrid? But that is your way. Now listen. I want your help. My stepfather, Prince Adolf, was greatly trusted by my mother, and he has grown to think himself the head of affairs in Siguria. I can't have that, yet I cannot stand alone—no woman can. I wanted to—I tried—I wouldn't admit it to anyone else, but it hasn't been a success. I need—I must have—a friend."

"We are not friends—we never can be *friends*," said Feldershey hastily.

She responded to this encouragement:

"How absurd! Why not? Of course we are friends. We can't help being friends. See how we quarrel the moment we meet! It comes so easily to us to be odious to each other! We are born friends. Why not? How absurd!"

Feldershey had never been insensible to her

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manner. 'The manner, he warned himself, even now was dangerous. Nevertheless, it had its charm. He braced himself for an exhibition of will power, and delivered himself in the following terms:—

"Five years ago, ma'am, I offered you my love. You did not want it. I do not blame you, but the fact that you did not want it made me feel that there was something in me which needed correction; so, from being a dull idle man, I became a dull working one. Say no more on the subject; I do not even discuss it with myself. It is all done with now, but I find that it is not so done with that I can be pleased to see you, and I wish you had kept away. We are not friends, we never can be friends—*friends.*"

"I daresay I often made you angry," sighed Margaret, fully conscious that she was gaining ground. "I'm sorry. I was stupid. Please forgive me anything I may have done in the past; whatever it was, I never meant it."

"You never meant it!" he said indignantly. "I don't suppose you did mean it. Women never do mean anything! That is just why I don't want to have anything to do with them, and I include you!"

"You are the rudest man I've ever met! And yet

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—I trust you—I wonder why?” she added, with a frankly artificial air of simplicity.

“I am not in the least worth your while.”

“If you weren’t, would I be here to-day? Would I tell you what I have told you? Would I forget my pride and humble myself?”

Feldershey could bear her better in a humble attitude, and he said, in a kinder voice than he had hitherto used—

“I am grateful for anything you choose to give me, so long as it is sincere; but you are such an actress.”

“Don’t we all have to act?” said the woman, almost in tears. “Isn’t that the curse of my position? By showing all I think and fear, I don’t betray myself but my whole kingdom. They call it playing the game—the game! If I cry, that would be unfair—I mustn’t cry. But I want—I must have your help—I must. And I know you so well that I know I can only gain my point by asking for even more kindness than you have shown me already! And you ought to be kind—haven’t I given you the advantage when I came here to ask a favour?”

“I don’t believe in favours.”

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"Will you advise me? You can't refuse your advice—you cannot."

"Are you acting, or are you sincere?"

"I'm not acting. During the war you were magnificent. I don't forget that you hate flattery, but I must say so—you were magnificent." At this point she became embarrassed, and dropped into the official tone which she adopted only for the opening of the Senate Houses once a year at the capital of Siguria. "The unfortunate etiquette which hedges the Royal Family makes it necessary for me to entertain projects, and even undertake them, which would otherwise— Can you follow what I say? because I can't."

"I seem to be following."

"There will be a rebellion—and I am frightened. Oh, what is the use of sixty thousand men in the field, unless I have someone to command them? Won't you help me? Won't you let them all see that I am not utterly alone?"

Feldershey was touched, and, because he was touched, he became ill-tempered.

"I won't be played upon—I will not have my life disturbed a second time! No, I have given up the old career—the trumpets and the bands and the

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uniform, and the slaughtering and the chatter and the inanity—and I've settled down in this old room; and then you come—not wholly spoilt yet, perhaps—from your artificial atmosphere and ask me to take part in a charade!"

"A charade! When men are being shot in the streets, and women are crying over their husbands and children, and those who wish to work cannot, and those who want power will sacrifice the lives of all my people. A charade! First they broke my heart, now they have broken my pride. I am in the dust."

She sat huddled on the edge of the lecture platform, which he had covered with draperies and cushions for her comfort; she was not crying, but her face was strained. She was piteous as an object, and, as a female object, undeniably appealing to a man who was proud of his strength. It seemed to Feldershey that it would be quite possible to crush her with one hand, physically at least. He doubted even then whether the strongest could break her morally. Still, to crush is pleasant and soothing.

"I never intended to be sorry for any woman again," said Feldershey.

"If I pretend to take it all so lightly," said

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Margaret, "it is only in order to gain time. You would believe me, I suppose, if I talked blank verse: the newspapers don't talk blank verse—read them if you won't believe me. Oh, they are right sometimes. I am discouraged—I am worn out. I should die if I didn't feel here that I must never give in. Prince Adolf—simpering in this studio—looks harmless enough, but he would see whole villages massacred to gain his point."

"Prince Adolf has already asked me to use my tact with you," said Feldershey, who was notorious for his tactlessness.

"Tact!"

"He says you are playing the fool."

"Well, that is a good beginning," said Margaret ironically.

"He thinks you ought to marry."

The princess wondered if such obtuseness were conceivable, if it could really exist in a human being, if a man could be so dense, and live!

"He thinks you ought to marry," repeated Feldershey, with a stupidity which was inborn, and therefore pardonable.

"That is the very question," said Margaret, "the one I want you to consider! As I said, the un-

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fortunate etiquette which hedges the Royal Family makes it necessary for me to entertain projects, and even undertake them, which would otherwise"— It was impossible to maintain her official tone. She held out her hand, not as though she wished it to be taken, but as though she would call attention to its singleness. "You feel the truth of all I have said about my difficulties, and yet you won't see the hardest of all—I must seem to speak first. Oh, it is so humiliating! It is awful! It is the reason why I said I would never marry. I have to see somebody, and suggest—in cold blood—that I should marry him. I cannot possibly assume that he loves me, and I shouldn't like him to assume that I love him. But, for the sake of old times—and you did speak first once, so it isn't quite so bad—and you did like me; or, at least, you said so—you said more than that—and so I thought of you naturally—when they said—when I really think myself—it is a duty to marry"—

Feldershey, with a smile which conveyed utter astonishment, triumph, incredulity, and suspicion, shouted—

"You don't want to marry *me*—do you?"

Margaret seemed pained, a shade reproachful.

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"I beg your pardon," said Feldershey hastily, "but one must be clear where marriage is involved."

Margaret was too great an adept in council meetings to allow a vital question once reached to be lost in evasions.

"I quite agree one must be clear where marriage is involved, but of course it is all quite formal."

"I am not assuming that you love me," said Feldershey, on his dignity; "you needn't be embarrassed—it's all quite formal."

"Absolutely formal."

"A political treaty, in fact."

"A political treaty—yes."

"You want me to fight for you?"

"For my country."

Feldershey tried to conceal his mortification.

"I understand. Your country is driving you into this marriage with me! But you must not sacrifice yourself. I'll fight for you. I don't ask for any reward; you shall not sacrifice yourself—I quite understand."

"No, you don't understand," said the princess. And indeed he did not understand, nor did Margaret wish him to understand—which was the main obstacle in his way. "As an example to my subjects, I must

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encourage marriage. I—see the obligation. I—I—am not making myself unhappy about it. I—I—respect you deeply. I feel, too, that you are the one man that we want in Siguria. But as I don't wish to conceal anything from you, I ought to say I am rather jealous. My mother, you may remember, was jealous! Someone might grow to love you, and then—if I were not your wife—I might feel her influence over you—do you see? Frankly, I should hate that—do you see? Marriage would save us from any complications of that kind! But I have another jealousy—I am jealous of the love of my people. That's my inheritance too, that is always with me; and, don't you see—it is so hard to say, but if you become my people's leader—not as my husband, but as my rival”—

Feldershey, who had been listening with a growing distrust of her motives, and a conviction that a woman with such a power of expressing herself was to be watched, replied flippantly—

“Yes, I understand. Then, I fear, if you really want me to help you”—

“I do—I do.”

“Then there is no other way out of it but marriage with me—painful as the idea must be.”

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"But"—said Margaret, as piqued by his light tone as he had hoped she would be.

"Don't try to explain," he went on, as though neither her feelings nor his mattered greatly to either, and the whole situation was, after all, amusing; "it would only hurt us both, perhaps—and, of course, the same argument would apply to any man—and I might be less likely to jar upon you than someone who had not known you ever since you were a little girl! I jar, no doubt; still"—

"Oh, you don't always jar upon me, and friendship is a basis—we are friends."

He forgot to be ironical, and answered quickly—

"That is the one thing I said we couldn't be."

This reassured her once more. Her spirits revived, but her face became despondent.

"So you refuse to help me?"

There were tears in her voice, and Feldershey, for a second, wondered whether he had gone too far in brutality.

"Forget what I said—forget it!" he exclaimed. "You didn't think I would refuse you, did you?"

She sighed deeply, and said she couldn't be sure.

"You can be sure," said Feldershey, with firmness;

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and he forgot for a moment the rendezvous with Baverstock. •

Margaret, now convinced that her hold on his affections was as strong as ever, became forbidding.

"Then we are allies," she said primly.

The primness, which seemed to him false, reminded him of Baverstock.

"I believe that is the term," he said, growing cold at once, "which would most perfectly describe the present situation. But," here his voice became harsh, "if I go back to that infernal soldiering, it will be on one condition: that when the work is done, I come back afterwards and take up my life here again."

"Back to the studio without me?"

"Without you—unless—unless"—

"Unless—?"

"You will come back with me," said Feldershey.

"Back to the studio, and give up everything?"

"My dear child, at present everything is being taken from you! You are very proud, and you don't want to get the worst of it! I understand you ask me to get your country back under your own control. Say, I succeed"—

"Yes."

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"To live out there," said he, with deliberation, "as the husband of the prima donna does not come into my ambition. I might have done it five years ago; I cannot and I will not do it now."

"You mean I must dress like a peasant, and work for my living, and read Tolstoy seriously?" She thought she must be playing in one of De Musset's light comedies. Feldershey had a fantastic side: he had often amused her at Berkele Abbey, years before, by his flights into fantasy—expeditions which always took place at an inappropriate moment in life, or in a conversation.

"I remember seeing photographs of you in the old days," continued Feldershey: "Princess Margaret and her Model Dairy—The Princess Margaret Knitting for the Poor—The Princess Margaret preparing a Workman's Dinner."

She began to fear he was in earnest. He had an infinite capacity for carrying the fantastic into action.

"But I should have to abdicate, like Christina of Sweden," she said, "and give up my country!"

"Not your country, but your artificial position: the court life, the tedious functions, the treacherous self-seeking politicians—the whole damnable circus, in fact!"

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"That means everything that most women care for."

"Everything—except the little *I* can give you—myself!"

He may not have been vain, but he had no mean idea of his sterling worth, and society had never permitted him to forget that women considered him good-looking. They had considered him good-looking with such persistency and conviction, that, with all the modesty in the world, he had been obliged sometimes to accept the situation.

"Why haven't you more confidence in yourself?" asked Margaret, who had a sense of humour.

"I have plenty of confidence in myself," said Feldershey, with characteristic simplicity, "but I have no confidence in you."

"Because I don't jump at the idea of renouncing all I possess in order to satisfy your pride!"

"It isn't my pride, it's my conviction."

"No, no; it is your pride."

"My absolute conviction!"

"Your pride!"

"Well," he said, "I don't ask you to come back with me."

The princess observed that he was not very gracious, and she made the remark dreamily, as though she

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were a connoisseur considering a genuine but not altogether happy example of some great master's art. It was, beyond doubt, a Velasquez, but not a Velasquez at his best; there were signs of an influence. Feldershey, conscious that he was under criticism and also that he deserved it, offered the nearest thing he could bring himself to utter in the way of an apology—

•
“I have worked out my plan of life, painfully and with struggles, and must I change it all—the discipline of these years—because you choose to come back, perfectly dressed, with all the old charm—oh, you are charming enough!—and your sweet nature—oh, you are sweet-natured enough!—and ask me to take up a way of living which I renounced in disgust and contempt? No; it must be understood when the work is done that I”—

“I'll do as you say,” said Margaret instantaneously.

It was as if the poisoning remembrance of her old perversity had been changed, magically to sweetness, and his five years of wrath had been made a honeyed summer by the breaking in of tender moonlight. It was as if the pretty child who had enslaved him, and the bewitching girl he had madly worshipped, had fulfilled all his romantic imaginations, and the woman

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stood before him as a rare being whom he had cruelly misjudged. It was as if his contemptuous view of life had been proved a nightmare; as if he stood in a new fair world, and, as a son of men, was loved by a daughter of the gods; as if gates of brass and bars of iron had been smitten, and he were released from a prison-house. This was his feeling, and his instinct urged him to clasp Margaret in his arms. But one cannot, in a moment, lose the restraint or the habits of distrust which one may have encouraged excessively for any number of years. So, instead of behaving as his heart prompted, he repeated, in a tone of amazement—

“You’ll come back here?”

“I’ll come back here.”

“With me?”

“Yes, if you want to come back,” she said earnestly, “I’ll come with you—but I don’t believe you will want to come back.”

“Margaret,” said Feldershey, really touched, “if I thought”—and he was on the point of declaring himself everlastingly hers, when she turned away and unfortunately said—

“I would do anything to ensure the peace of my country—anything!”

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"Your country!" And Feldershey laughed.

"I love my country," said Margaret, in a tone of heroic exaltation which seemed to carry her above the earth levels and beyond him. "I love my wayward, quarrelsome people. Save them, and I will be satisfied."

This was rhetoric, and she knew it, but he did not. So he said, as though he were weighing the terms of a lease—

"And if I cannot save them?"

"We shall each have done our best." She was so delighted with the success of her interview and the reassurance she had gained, in spite of his manner, of his old affection, that she forgot that he too, on his side, might be looking for some sign or spark of tenderness. It was a natural, and therefore a foolish, mistake. "It is agreed—we are engaged—we are to be married?"

"It is agreed, ma'am, we are to be married," said Feldershey.

She permitted him to kiss her gloved hand.

"This must be a secret for the present," she continued; and then, as they heard the murmuring of voices drawing nearer, she added hastily, "They must find us talking as though nothing had happened

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—I spent the winter in Paris, buying more clothes than I can ever wear, and meeting people—who are so charming that one cannot ask them to meet one's relations.”

By this time Prince Adolf and the others had entered the studio. The princess called out—

“Mopsle, my work-case, please.”

The baroness came forward and held out a silk bag which she had been carrying on her arm.

“Lord Feldershey,” said Margaret, “as this is your birthday, I want to ask you to accept as a little gift this embroidered waistcoat.”

“And worked with her own hands,” observed the baroness.

“The honour is overwhelming!” said Feldershey; and, taking the gift, he put it down uncouthly on the table with his palette and painting rags.

Margaret coloured, glanced at Mopsle to remind her that she had been warned of the man's rudeness, and said, with forced gaiety—

“Now the picture. We haven't seen that yet!”

Feldershey strode to the easel and looked bitterly at his own masterpiece.

“This,” said he, “is Pan playing divinely, and

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nobody is listening, and nobody cares, and that man and that woman have lost their way."

"But surely they find it?" said the princess.

"I don't know, ma'am—that is the picture, anyhow. I painted it; somebody else must explain it."

Prince Adolf studied the canvas for some seconds without speaking. He shaded his eyes; he stepped backwards and forwards; he gave, as it were, a thumb-nail sketch of a professional critic at a private view.

"I wish," said he, "that the flute would cure my symptoms. A passing cloud, a coming storm, the approach of rain—anything, in fact, which causes an electric tension in the atmosphere—wears me out. Is Pan for sale?"

"Baverstock wants to buy it," said Feldershey, watching Margaret.

"That dreadful young man!" said the prince. "I wondered why I found him here to-day."

"I don't think he is dreadful," said Margaret; "he is tiresome, but very, very handsome and intrepid."

Feldershey grew sick with jealousy.

"Intrepid!" said her stepfather; "insolent, you mean!"

"No, dear papa," said Margaret, "intrepid." Then

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she rose and said she must be going. "We leave for my little villa at Florence to-night. You will come there, won't you?" she said to Feldershey. "You will like the villa; it has always been my favourite house; my happiest days have been spent there. That is why I dare not see it often: the charm might go. I will write to you. And you will paint my portrait, won't you? We have enjoyed ourselves so much."

She kissed Lady Feldershey, who curtseyed, and the two ladies went toward the door together.

Adolf plucked Feldershey by the sleeve.

"Did you get on the topic of marriage? Did you draw her out?"

Feldershey ignored the question, and suggested that they should follow the ladies. Adieux were once more exchanged all round, and the royal party were handed into the gondola.

Feldershey, instead of remaining on the landing-stage until the charming group had passed out of sight, hurried with a clouded brow into his studio.

"Why," said Lady Feldershey, putting her hand on his shoulder, "was the princess here twice this afternoon?"

He wondered how much she knew, and he was

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determined to tell her nothing. He was equally determined not to lie if he could help it.

"Twice! What do you mean?" he asked.

"I saw her with my own eyes," said his mother, "as I was coming back in the gondola. I thought she had come to see you, but no—Harry Baverstock came—you went out by the side door, and left them alone together. Then, when the princess came, I recognised the same cloak, the same veil. It was the same woman!"

"She is her own mistress, isn't she?"

"My dear boy, I wasn't born yesterday. She came here to meet Baverstock."

"I say she is her own mistress—isn't she?"

"I hope so," said Lady Feldershey drily. "If she came here to-day, it was, of course, to use you as some sort of a screen."

This was the word too much.

"What did you say?"

"I said," she murmured, "that Margaret may have had her motives."

He threw her ladyship a warning glance, which reminded her for a second time that morning of his father's temper when driven to extremities. It could reach an irresponsible pitch.

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"She hasn't the least idea," said Feldershey, "that I know anything about it, and you must swear to me that you will never tell her."

"Anything to please you. You have loved her ever since she was a little girl, and you will love her to the end!"

"Do you want to drive me mad?"

Her eyes filled with tears. Tears could not stop a temper, but they could stem language.

"I didn't mean it," he said hastily. "But will you tell me what Margaret sees in Baverstock?" She tried to reply, but he shouted, "No, don't answer!" and went out, banging the door.

Lady Feldershey, who was a woman of action, walked to the table, and put his palette, his paints, and painting rags into the casone.

She knew there would be no more painting done for months.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH WIRES ARE PULLED FOR A GOOD MOTIVE

EXISTENCE at the Villa Santa Fiore, passed in a frivolous manner, and, as a state which could not, by any human possibility, last, it was enjoyed to desperation by the Princess Margaret and her household. There was a certain routine observed in the course of the days, but it was a routine of pleasures and amusements, parties, dances, dinners, music, card-playing, singing, flirtations, the buying of objects of art, expeditions to places of historical interest, saunterings in the garden where fountains played, and roses, oleanders and azaleas, camellias, cypress trees and ilex, magnolia, orange trees, lemon trees and myrtle, grape vines, syringa, laburnum, and every sort of romantic shrub and flower grew, in its time, to perfection. There were swans on the lake, gold and silver fish in the marble basins on the terrace; pigeons walking and flying in every

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direction; peacocks strutted where they would; nightingales, at the right season, sang in the small groves and in the long pergola when it was deserted.

Feldershey, on finding himself once more in the luxurious surroundings to which he had been accustomed all his life, was at first lulled into a tolerance of wealth. It was pleasant to spend one's days in a beautiful villa near one of the loveliest cities in the world; to have the woman whom he adored for a companion; a train of servants in picturesque liveries to wait upon him; delicious food; fine horses and dogs; and no responsibilities. It seemed especially pleasant after the fierce excitements of war, the crowded desolation of a London season, and his melancholy weeks at Venice. But it was not in him to enjoy inactivity, and after he had seen every room in the villa, and every living or inanimate thing in the gardens, he became restless, sardonic, and ill-conditioned. He decided that Margaret was unlovable—although he did not go so far as to tell himself that he loved her no longer. He doubted her truthfulness; he cursed his own folly in having agreed to a marriage; and a hundred times he resolved to break with her for ever before the

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irrevocable step was taken. But although he spent a week at Santa Fiore, he never once saw Margaret alone. He talked far more to her cousin, the Countess Rixensart; and whereas the words he exchanged with that sprightly creature were intimate, easy, and amusing, his conversations with Margaret were on distant, academic themes, and maintained in the presence of her entire suite. She made her first appearance always at three in the afternoon; she invariably withdrew from the circle at half-past ten—leaving the others to retire when they pleased. Count Rixensart was there to chaperon his young wife; Prince Adolf was a widower and a valetudinarian; the Mistress of the Robes, Madame von Rauser, was a handsome widow, thoroughly alive to her own merits and the value of chastity; Count Marche, Her Royal Highness's favourite equerry, was too poor to contemplate matrimony, and therefore he was secretly engaged (it was said) to a person of no birth, whom he was having educated in Paris. He visited her at her convent school every month or so, and the princess found the story most touching. She believed every word she was told, because she herself was constitutionally truthful. Rixensart, on the other hand, would roll his eyes

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and whistle through a hollow tooth whenever he was alone and happened to think of Marche. Margaret was much attached to the members of her suite, but they exasperated Feldershey, who regarded them all as bores, intruders, and incorrigible absorbents of the lady's time. His mother, who felt the irritation underlying his brief notes, hoped that all would come right after the marriage, but she could not pretend to understand such a strange pair of lovers, who seemed, at one and the same time, close friends and keen antagonists. She could not doubt that her son was devoted, in some unwilling, resentful, and almost ferocious way, to Margaret; and she could not doubt that Margaret, who had a dozen eager suitors of the most illustrious sort, was devoted, in some strange, serene, and dispassionate way, to Feldershey.

"Do people know what they mean when they speak of devotion?" she wrote to her son. "I am bewildered by the protestations of modern men and women. The women are 'simply devoted' to motors, old furniture, pet animals, their husbands, their houses, and Tom, Dick, and Harry. The men are 'simply devoted' to a new person every other month, for whom they would not make the smallest sacrifice of amusement or comfort.

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I don't know where I am. But God's Will be done."

The truth of his mother's remarks did not relieve the tension of Feldershey's spirits; he considered himself hit between the eyes by the force of her unsparing common sense. He did not answer her letter, and he hoped she would regard him as one whom she had deeply injured. Had he not renounced his fortune, and lived on ten shillings a week? Yes, for an idea; not for the sake of any woman. Still, the woman, by her conduct, had driven him to consider serious views of life. His renunciation of the world and its empty prizes had been an indirect tribute to the power of love—no matter how disastrously bestowed.

On a certain morning, some two weeks after the Princess Margaret's visit to Feldershey's studio, Countess Rixensart might have been seen in the princess's private drawing-room, writing at a small desk. The countess was under thirty, pretty, graceful, and extremely ingenuous in her expression. She was neither a minx nor a cat, but a shrewd little lady who had her way to make in a world which she knew without an effort. On this particular morning, Hassell, the Groom of the Chambers, stood

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at the entrance to the royal boudoir, as though he were on guard. The room was full of white flowers; real garlands were hanging over the frescoes on the walls. Flags were hanging from the balcony outside, and the doors which led to the private chapel seemed to have been freshly gilded for some extraordinary occasion.

"Let me know how soon 'I may expect Her Royal Highness," said the countess, suddenly turning.

"Her Royal Highness," said Hassell, in pompous tones, "is having her hair done."

Bertha continued scribbling, and she did not speak again until a footman crossed the room, bearing a note on a silver salver.

"Who is that for?" she asked.

"Her Royal Highness," said Hassell.

"Give it to me," said Bertha.

Hassell presented the salver; she took the note, and gave it a smile of recognition, as though it were an acquaintance. Hassell, who preserved an imperturbable demeanour, watched her under his heavy, sleepy eyelids, whilst she walked to a corner, opened the envelope, and drew out a sheet of paper. "This she read hurriedly. Hassell observed her cheeks'

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deepening pink. She had by nature a brilliant flush, which varied rarely, and passed with the malicious for rouge. Hassell heard himself called with some softness, and he advanced respectfully.

"Hassell," said the Countess Rixensart, "I am expecting Mr. Baverstock to see me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lady."

"He will arrive while the wedding ceremony is going on."

"Yes, my lady."

"When he arrives, show him in here."

At this point, Bertha took a small gold piece from her purse and dropped it into his palm with gingerly grace.

"Now, you manage all that for me nicely, and, as you know," she added, dropping her lashes, "Mr. Baverstock is extremely generous."

"Yes, my lady."

"That will do," said Bertha; and, going over to the writing-table, she resumed her task.

She had been writing, perhaps, for ten or fifteen minutes, when an officer of some bulk, in an extremely fine uniform, walked unannounced and

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hurriedly into the room. He had an implacable countenance and a determined jaw. His age was about forty-five, and he seemed to have lived every day of his time on this earth. His manner was severe, abrupt, official, and, when he addressed the Countess Rixensart, possessive.

"Are you busy?" said he.

"I am just correcting the list of wedding presents," said his wife sweetly.

"Anybody about?"

"Not a soul. Margaret is still in her room."

Count Rixensart took some marching steps round the furniture.

"I suppose you are dressed for the wedding?" said he.

"Can't you see that I am dressed?" said Bertha, whose gown had arrived that morning from Vienna.

"This ridiculous marriage with Lord Feldershey has altered all my plans," said Rixensart. "How does it look? A hurried marriage—semi-private—only a few relations present—she might be the fifth daughter of some little grand duke."

"Hasn't she always said that she would not have a state marriage? And she is determined."

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"He will make her do all sorts of mad things. A great deal will depend on how much she likes him."

"She likes him—she is in love with him."

"Well, he influences her, and that is what concerns *me*," said the count. "Influence is more important than love." He spoke the word "love" as though it were pudding—a thing he no longer ate.

"I have often noticed, darling," said Bertha plaintively, "that many women who love their husbands never think of obeying them."

"Feldershey, at any rate, will see that he is obeyed," said Rixensart, leaning over the sofa and fixing his expressive eyes on his wife. "The English War Office hasn't forgotten him yet. The man to cultivate, therefore, is Feldershey. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said the countess.

"I gave him a pretty strong lead at dinner last night, and if he doesn't take an early opportunity of giving me a governorship, I shall make myself disagreeable."

"Oh," said Bertha, in alarm, "you are not going to do anything heroic, are you, darling?"

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"You see what you can do with him first. Try and find out what he is driving at, and manage him better than you managed Prince Adolf."

"Darling!" said the lady, protesting.

"I have allowed that vain old fool to caper round you in the hope that you would get him to do something for me. He hasn't done a thing."

"He is very thick-headed, dear."

"Well, I am sick of it, and, for the future, just see a little less of him. In the meantime, we must sit on the fence, and watch which way the cat jumps."

"I hope it will be a nice comfortable padded fence, darling," said Bertha anxiously, "for somehow, nowadays, cats don't seem to jump at all!"

"Well, cat or no cat, you have got to change your tactics. Now I have got to go and look after that infernal Crown Prince of Alberia."

And, with a glance which was not so unaffectionate as it was commanding, the Master of the Horse hurried away through the gilded doors of the private chapel of the princess.

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Bertha had decided, long before her husband, that Lord Feldershey was the man to cultivate, and to that end she had employed all her gifts and talents actively. She had realised, at a glance, that she was not what is technically known as his lordship's type—for the prettier the woman, the less apt is she to be vain in the estimate of her own powers over men. From easy experience, every beauty soon learns the kind of man to whom she can irresistibly appeal, and she is usually most good-humoured in owning her powerlessness over the particular class of individual who will prefer opposite attractions to her own. Although the Princess Margaret and Countess Rixensart were first cousins, and each was considered peculiarly fascinating to the other sex, they were so unlike in every way, and to such an extreme degree, that, while anyone might have admired both as representing two distinct schools of coquetry, no one could have loved both. It was clear to Bertha that Feldershey's infatuation for Margaret had become part of his constitution: that it belonged to those curious attachments which can be disturbed, denied, and disguised, but never broken. Such attachments may die when the man dies: they can sleep for years—only to wake with consuming force. Bertha was

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incapable of inspiring such an affection, nor did she even wish for such a thing. She was light-hearted and shallow, cold in her soul, but tender in her manners: if she had no passion, she certainly had no vices; and if she was not romantic, she was dainty in her sentiments. In the art of conducting a love-suit nowhither, she excelled; and she had persuaded each of her admirers, in checking their boldest aspirations, that the effort cost her pangs for which the proud sense of having remembered her duty was a stern consolation. By this method she offended none and compelled a certain respect—if not for her honesty, at least for her prudence. She did not doubt that she could obtain a few impersonal favours from Lord Feldershey, so long as she asked for them with childish candour and accepted them, for her husband's sake, as kindnesses from a relative by marriage. The very fact of her near kinship with Margaret gave her a real claim to Feldershey's regard: he liked her quite well, she thought.



Bertha's reverie was broken in upon by the voice of Hassell: "Her Royal Highness is trying on her shoes, and she desires the Countess Rixensart to go to her."

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The countess made a gesture of impatience, patted the curls on her forehead, smoothed down her tight little bodice, which fitted her like a glove and tripped toward her cousin's bedroom.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THREE PEOPLE ARE NERVOUS

LADY FELDERSHEY had risen that morning early, and driven in to the Protestant church to pray for blessings on her son's wedding day. She was proud of the match, and yet it was not a marriage she had ever really wanted. Margaret's position and brilliancy made her almost too remarkable as a daughter-in-law. Lady Feldershey, moreover, had always hoped to see her son united with some docile daughter of an English duke, a sweet girl whom she herself, as the dowager, could guide and govern. The idea of ng and governing the Princess Margaret was nkable, and Lady Feldershey, who was rightly considered a very great lady indeed in Great Britain and Ireland, realised, in spite of Margaret's tact, that, so far as Europe was concerned, the two women met on difficult terms, so considerable was the difference in their rank. In private, all went well enough; everything could be easy, natural, intimate,

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unceremonious, even homely; but in public, Lady Feldershey was obliged to efface herself completely, and observe the official distinctions which exist between royalties and those who are not royal. She thought and believed that she did not mind this: in the depths of her heart, she hated it. As she returned from the church to the fine suite of rooms which had been placed at her disposal in the princess's villa, she wept bitterly under her thick veil. She would have wept in any case on her son's wedding day, because the meekest wife in the world would still have the first claim upon his love and the first right to his attention. Was not this the law of Christianity? Her ladyship, as a devout Christian, could not quarrel with it. But, as a human being, she wept. On entering her room, she was somewhat cheered to observe her beautiful new gown spread out on the bed, and to remember that, when she had tried it on, it had proved exceedingly becoming. Her maid prevailed upon her to take a short sleep—with the result that she awoke an hour later in fairly good spirits, and with the strength to bear herself at the ceremony with the air of gratification universally considered appropriate for such an occasion.

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The bride, on her part, had slept serenely, had been called at her usual hour, had rushed to the window to examine her complexion, had read and written a number of letters. If she was agitated, she did not show it. To begin with, she had no doubt about the good sense of her choice. True, she felt that Feldershey nursed some secret grievance against her: that he had never forgiven her laughter, five years before, at his love. He had a grudge, and he could not bury it. He was a bad-tempered man; an unreasonable man; an ungracious man; an exacting man; a man who sulked; a man whose way of loving was anything but tender; a man who did not understand women; a man who hurt her feelings constantly, sometimes not meaning to do so, sometimes by design; a man, in fact, whom she found it most difficult to love,—uphill work.

“Do I love him?” she asked the Baroness D’Albreuse.

“Do you blush when he comes into the room, ma’am?” suggested the baroness.

“I blush sometimes when a hairdresser comes into the room,” answered Margaret, “but I have never blushed when Lord Feldershey came in.”

The baroness, whose knowledge of the great

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passion had been drawn exclusively from novels, did not know what to think.

"If I love such a man," Margaret told herself, "it is because he is my fate from which I cannot escape, and not because I could ever wish to love him."

This made her hard lot easier and her resignation complete. Why trouble? why think any more? why question the will of the gods? She saw tragedy in the situation; it was tragedy by sunlight—with perpetual midsummer and its storms in the atmosphere.

Feldershey, meanwhile, had not closed his eyes all night. He had paced the floor of his room until he could bear it no longer. Then he descended to the garden, and wandered there till daybreak. He could not call himself happy, and yet he was not unhappy. He wondered what would happen: he wondered whether he had made a mistake; and yet he was perfectly certain that he was doing the right thing. The fact that he was suffering from jealousy never occurred to his mind. He called the malady by every other name, and he told himself that it was a pity he could admire, yet remain wholly unable to love, his future wife. Such is the force of self-

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deception. It was really a thousand pities, he told himself again and again; it was tragic; he did not love her, and he could not pretend to love her. She had cured all that by her own conduct long ago. It was sad; it was awful. Then he wondered about Baverstock. What had she seen in Baverstock? How could she call him handsome? He supposed that it was the type of vulgar comeliness which attracted even the most refined of women. How revolting! How inexplicable! He had tried, on one or two occasions, to introduce Baverstock's name into the conversation, but Margaret had invariably changed the subject. Once he caught her exchanging a quick glance with Bertha, and he decided that the Countess Rixensart could have thrown, had she chosen, much light on the subject. But he scorned the notion of discussing Baverstock and Margaret with the Countess Rixensart. No, whatever the story was, he would hear it from Margaret herself—no one else. At last the hour came for dressing, and his servant, who helped him into his uniform, found his lordship taciturn and surly, nevertheless anxious to look his best.

"She does not think me so handsome as that poodle Baverstock!" he thought.

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Nor was he so handsome as Bayerstock—point for point. He had not Harry's straight nose, his curved lips, his head of smooth, light blonde hair, his long eyelashes, his melting eyes, his general air of a lover in story-books.

"Inexplicable!" ejaculated Feldershey aloud, and his servant thought he was swearing at his top-boots.

"Who is that knocking at the door?" he shouted presently.

"It is I."

He recognised his mother's voice, and, with one boot on and the other in the middle of the floor, his lordship limped across the room and opened the door himself:—

"What is it?"

Lady Feldershey stood before him in her fine velvet gown and her toque, composed of artificial Gloire de Dijon roses and real Venetian lace, from Virot's. She carried in her hand a large, unmistakably English, bouquet.

"I know it is not correct for a royalty to carry a bouquet," said Lady Feldershey, pronouncing the word as though it were "bookey"; "but gardeners don't know that, and, as dear old Addison made

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this himself, and sent it from Berkele, I'm sure Margaret would like to see it."

Feldershey took the bunch from her hand and plunged his face into it, inhaling the fragrance of the jasmine.

"So these are from Berkele," said he. "Jarvis!"

"Yes, my lord," said his servant.

"Will you take this to Her Royal Highness, with Lady Feldershey's love, and say it comes from Berkele Abbey? We know she cannot carry it, but it is from our old gardener."

"Isn't that rather too informal, dearest boy?" said Lady Feldershey timidly. "Can Jarvis take such a message?"

"Do as you are told," said Feldershey, stamping his foot.

"Yes, my lord," said Jarvis, and he hastened away.

Lord Feldershey turned to his mother with the defiant expression which she knew too well, and as she felt utterly unequal to the strain of meeting it that morning, she closed her eyes with an air of fatigue, and sank upon the sofa.

"I wonder if I can just rest here a few minutes. I hope I look all right," she murmured.

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"Charming!" said Feldershey, absorbed in studying his own reflection.

"There is one thing I want to ask you," said his mother, looking round the splendid room and owning to herself that he had little indeed to complain of in his fate. "There is one thing I want to ask you," she repeated: "you won't mind?"

"That means I ought to mind!"

"No, no, but—I am worried. Has Margaret told you nothing yet about her visit to the studio? And Baverstock?"

"No!" said Feldershey, wheeling round and hurling another dart of wrath from his eyes to her soul.

"But you intend to ask her, surely?" said Lady Feldershey, sustained this time by the mere fact that she was, after all was said and done, his mother. Had she not found the strength, thirty years before, to send him repeatedly to bed without his tea? "But you intend to ask her, surely?" she said again.

"No; she must tell me herself. If you can't see that, you can't see anything! Call it my pride if you like: call it her pride too. It *is* pride! No doubt she will tell me in her own way and at her own time."

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"And you want her to tell you in *your* own way and at *your* own time!"

"I daresay," said Feldershey irritably.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Jarvis, who had the bridal-morning smile of a favourite, if frequently grieved, retainer.

"Her Royal Highness desires your ladyship to go to Her Royal Highness's apartments."

"Certainly, certainly," said her ladyship; "and take that piece of thread off my train, Jarvis."

Feldershey opened the door for his mother, and, as she passed him, gave her a smile of approval. She was looking extremely handsome, and when beauty did not enrage him, it made him good-humoured. But Jarvis caught his good-humour on the rebound.

"What is the matter with that infernal boot?"

The rest of the monologue was more expressive than coherent. Decidedly his lordship was upset.

"Her ladyship always upsets him," thought Jarvis: "most women do, and especially Her Royal Highness."

"I am leading," said Feldershey, at the end of his worst utterances, "an unnatural life, you fool!"

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH AN ANGRY GENTLEMAN IS SOOTHED

WHEN Lady Feldershey was ushered into Margaret's apartments, Bertha was dismissed, and, humming "Au clair de la lune," she tripped back again to her little task at the writing-table in the private drawing-room, or, as it was called, the Saloon of the Quatre Saisons, because of the frescoes on the walls. To her astonishment and pleasure, she observed Lord Feldershey seated in her place and scrutinising his own features in the gilt mirror supported by a gilt Venus which stood by the inkstand. Should she go forward and speak to him, or should she wait modestly until she was noticed? Suddenly, her eyes fell upon "The Flute of Pan," which stood on an easel near the balcony. Clasp ing her hands, she took up a position in front of this masterpiece, and sighed so deeply that Feldershey was thus made aware of her presence.

"How nice of you not to stare at me!" he exclaimed, much touched by her exhibition of interest in his

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work. "If there is anyone on earth who both looks and feels ridiculous, it is a bridegroom."

"Do you know," said Bertha, with great gravity, "this picture fascinates me? I cannot leave it. If I go away it calls me back. It must be Pan's music. Have you yourself ever heard it?"

"No, never," said Feldershey, "but I believe in it."

He went to the window and gazed at the Alps in the distance. Bertha studied his back, and wondered what she could say next. He was certainly unresponsive.

"How you must have suffered," she murmured, "in order to paint like that!"

This appeal to his egoism did not fail. He turned round and looked at her with kindness.

"What do you know about suffering, little lady?"

"Oh, a great deal," said Bertha piteously. "But you don't understand—nobody understands—and yet I hoped that *you* might."

"I do, my child, I do."

"Would you call me silly?" she asked.

"Certainly not; you are very clever."

"You feel that because you are an artist. My husband thinks of nothing but his career. I don't suppose," she added innocently, watching his ex-

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pression, "that Frederick will ever be really contented until he gets a governorship in the hills."

"Do you mean to say he wants to imprison you up in the hills—a pretty, bright little woman like you?"

The compliments were charming, but he uttered them without feeling, and went back to the writing-table.

"Yes, he does. But if Frederick ~~does~~ get a governorship," continued Bertha, undaunted, "Margaret might let me come down and visit her sometimes. I like to tell you my troubles."

At this point she went to him, put her tiny hand on his; then, as though she had taken a liberty, she withdrew it prudishly, and managed to convey the idea that she thought she had been betrayed into giving him a caress.

"May I tell you more another time?"

Feldershey did not hear her. His glance fell on the envelope addressed in Baverstock's handwriting to the Princess Margaret. It was the envelope which had contained the note which Bertha had secured that morning.

"Isn't that Baverstock's writing?" asked Feldershey, with assumed indifference. "What a fist!"

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"Oh, he just sent a little note to Margaret," said Bertha, terrified; but she seized the envelope as she spoke, tore it up, and threw it into the waste-paper basket. "I mustn't stay. You are too interesting," she said. Then she touched his shoulder, and added, in a tone of deep concern, "Something is troubling you, isn't it?"

"No, no," said Feldershey, fousing himself; "you mustn't think that. But marriage means a new life for me."

"Darling Margaret is such a handful," said Bertha artlessly.

"A brilliant creature—very proud; but then she has always had her own way—and I have got to have mine!" Here, his expression made the gentle dove shiver.

"It is a mistake to be weak with her," said Bertha. "All the other men have always been so weak."

"The—other men," said Feldershey thoughtfully.

"She could always twist them round her little finger," continued Bertha. "Dear Margaret is too wonderful in that way, because, although she is an angel of goodness, she has always had such very amusing times! I have always said that no other woman could ever have carried off, with success, the

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situations which she seems to have managed perfectly. You see, so few men have her strong will. I hardly know one who, if it came to the point"—Lord Feldershey ground his teeth, whereupon Bertha added hastily, "You are the one man, I think, whom she respects. She has never flirted with you. One doesn't flirt, does one, with the man one marries? Frederick and I never flirted. It is the best beginning in the long run. But I ~~must~~ go away; it wouldn't do if I were found here."

Feldershey did not attempt to dissuade her from her purpose; but he thought her a straightforward, well-meaning, sympathetic woman. Without tact, perhaps; but these tactful women were by no means the most sincere, nor could they always be trusted.

It was a thousand pities that he could admire, yet remain wholly unable to love, his future wife. It was tragic: he did not love her, and he could not pretend to love her. And the envelope in Baverstock's handwriting! An abomination! It was sad; it was awful, etc. etc., and the reverie of the morning, as it were a leit-motif in an opera, recommenced.

CHAPTER VIII

CONTAINING THE PLAIN LANGUAGE OF A PRETTY LADY

HASSELL had informed one of Her Royal Highness's dressers, and the dresser had informed the Baroness D'Albreuse, and the baroness told the princess that Lord Feldershey was talking with the Countess Rixensart in the saloon of Les Quatre Saisons. Margaret, at the moment, was on the point of removing the lace jacket which she had worn over her finery, during the arrangement of her coiffure. She had been in her sweetest humour, for she had mingled her tears with Lady Feldershey's over the bouquet from Berkele, and the two ladies had enjoyed a sentimental conversation without any of the restraint imposed by reason. All women are sentimental, and when they can indulge their cravings in that direction without fear of being misunderstood or laughed at, their gratification is extreme.

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The scene had opened in the most auspicious manner, for, while Lady Feldershey was, as it were, in full armour, and all the bravery of her wedding garments and her jewels and her inimitable toque, Margaret had not proceeded further with her dressing than her corsets and a short silk petticoat. It was the first time that Lady Feldershey had ever seen her at such a becoming and intimate disadvantage: she was thus able to forget entirely the atmosphere, the etiquette, and the artificiality of court life.

"And are you really happy about our marriage?" asked Margaret, with a directness which the ladies-in-waiting associated with her toilette at the short-petticoat stage.

"Boris has always loved you," said Lady Feldershey, "although he has a strange way sometimes. Look," she added, removing a small miniature set in diamonds from one of her bracelets (she wore a number): "I have this little portrait of him when he was three. I wanted to give it to you quietly."

"At three!" said Margaret, in an awe-stricken tone, studying with as much curiosity as pleasure the small face in the miniature, which represented a

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ailing, immobile child with very pink cheeks, very large eyes, and a thick shock of hair.

"The curls," said Lady Feldershey proudly, "were quite natural—his father had them cut off."

"He seems to have been a stout little boy; his arms look too big for his sleeves."

"A very fine child! The lace frock was a present from the Queen. Don't let him see it—he would never forgive me—but I thought you would like it."

"It's a darling!" said Margaret, with such evident sincerity that Lady Feldershey withdrew her secret objections to the marriage.

"I knew you would like it," she said, and succeeded in believing that at the beginning of the interview she had been perfectly convinced that it would end in that way.

The ladies kissed each other again, and separated, each in the best of spirits. What then were Margaret's feelings on having her serene mood crudely interrupted by the singular news—or the news which seemed singular—conveyed with so much concern by the ingenuous Mopsle. Her Royal Highness did not remove her lace jacket, and, having assured herself that Lord Feldershey was no longer with Bertha, she walked straight into the saloon,

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where the Countess Rixensart was now wondering how far she had advanced her husband's prospects.

"What did Boris want?" asked Margaret. "I heard his laugh."

"He is nervous," said Bertha, "but I can always laugh him out of his bad humours."

"Nervousness is not temper," said the princess, endeavouring to control her own. "And I just want to say that you must drop this habit of yours of always trying to get Boris into corners. You are always whispering or asking him to get things for you. The other night at the ball you made him march up and down with you after supper. What is he to do? He can't refuse—you are my cousin. It is vulgar of you—it is really. I myself don't mind, but it creates so much bad feeling in the court. It looks like"—she paused for the word—"favouritism!"

Bertha, with an air of pensiveness, observed with genuine concern—

"Perhaps I didn't realise how attentive Boris was to me."

"Attentive!" exclaimed Margaret. "He is not in the least attentive. He is a well-bred man. If you keep asking him to do things, and calling him here, there, and everywhere, he has to play up. *Noblesse*

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oblige! I have a great mind to tell him about Baverstock."

"Oh yes, do," said Bertha, flushing scarlet, "do the mean thing—tell him!"

"I will do so if you don't show any regard for my wishes."

"Still," said Bertha, "I don't think he would be so shocked as you seem to suppose, or he wouldn't have lent his studio to Mr. Baverstock for a meeting with a woman."

Margaret was startled at this idea.

"Did Mr. Baverstock tell him he was going to meet a woman?"

"You can be quite sure he didn't mention names: men *never* mention names."

"I can only hope not. I don't want to be ashamed of my own cousin. It's a very disagreeable story: I am not too proud of it."

Here she made a gesture which Bertha accepted as the royal permission to sit down.

"Thank you," said Bertha meekly; but she chose the sofa, spread out her skirts, and surveyed the tip and the heel of her very pointed, thickly beaded shoe.

"I think you are very much in love with Boris,"

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she said, with a reassuring manner which was, for some reason, most irritating to Margaret. "You always pretended you weren't."

Margaret tossed her head:

"That has nothing to do with it."

"If this isn't jealousy, I never saw it."

"If I were going to be jealous, I shouldn't be jealous of you, my dear Bertha!"

"I ~~thought~~ it seemed rather silly."

"You never had any idea of dignity," continued the princess. "You always make yourself cheap. Men hate women who run after them as you do!"

"I am not sure," said Bertha, as though she were thinking aloud, and therefore irresponsible for the utterance, "that men do admire this dignity—only they don't call it dignity: they think you are constitutionally incapable of feeling!"

"If I don't show any feeling now," said Margaret, turning pale with vexation, "it is because I daren't let myself go! You, with your silly little notions and sentiments, can indulge them all day long. They take nothing out of you; they don't hurt anybody else! But if I once began, it would be the most terrible rage and fury you ever saw. I would stick at nothing! I am afraid of no one. I should

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defy the whole world. I am not fit for this age at all: I have to adapt myself to it. It is true I can't mew—yes, mew and purr like you and the other pussy cats! So I set my teeth and say nothing. I endure, and I wonder”—

The Baroness D'Albreuse, on hearing the princess's voice pitched at an emotional level, thought it better to interrupt the conversation.

“The time is getting on, your Royal Highness,” she mentioned, as she stood on the threshold of the saloon.

Margaret thanked her, but continued her address to the Countess Rixensart.

“You must understand once for all,” said she, sitting down on the sofa and gazing well into Bertha's eyes, “that Boris belongs to me. And if there are any cushions to be carried, they must be *mine*; and if there is any poetry to be read aloud, it is to be read aloud to *me*; and if there is any advice to be given, it is to be given to *me*; and if there's any music to be turned over, it is to be *my* music. If there are any hats to be chosen, they are to be *my* hats; and if there are any opinions to be offered about dress, they are to be *my* dresses; and if any flowers are to be pinned in anybody's hair, they are to be pinned in *my* hair; and if any shoes have to be

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tied, they are to be *my* shoes! I won't have my husband dancing attendance on any living creature except myself. Now, you had better go and see if Lady Feldershey has everything she wants. You might look after some of my women guests for a change!"

Bertha rose, made her curtsy, gave a plaintive smile, patted the curls on her own forehead, and smoothed down her tight little bodice—two precautions which she rarely omitted on entering or leaving an apartment—and went out.

"I can't have Bertha in my house another hour; another instant!" said Margaret, turning to the Baroness D'Albreuse. "She flirts with Boris under my very nose. She thinks he likes her; she wants to make out that she understands him better than I do! Better than I do! I ask you—haven't I told you that nothing would induce me to marry a man who went in for this kind of thing? It isn't too late. Thank Heaven! it isn't too late. Oh, I know what you are going to say. You say I can't possibly make a scandal at the eleventh hour—and for no earthly reason."

Here, the sound of horses below the window made her look out.

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"There he is crossing the courtyard!" she exclaimed. "Doesn't he look splendid in his uniform?" She waved to him and smiled. "Oh yes, he can kiss his hand! Of course, he is devoted to me. I hope Bertha can see him. Just peep out of that window and see if she is watching. Is she? It serves her right! How dare she suppose that she has the least chance? Women are certain to run after him. He attracts them by his rudeness. Their only hope is that I shall lose my temper, get disagreeable, and drive him away. They make a great mistake. If I were dying of jealousy, I shouldn't show it. Nothing is so fatal. A jealous person gets more and more boring, and the other women, by comparison, seem more and more charming. My plan is quite the other way round. I intend to be a perfect darling, and the worse I feel here," she pressed her heart, "the happier I shall seem. I know it isn't dignified to care so much, but I do care, I have always cared. He has spoiled me for all the others. I know he loves me, and I have never been able to love anyone else as I love him."

"Then why don't you tell him so, ma'am?" said the Baroness D'Albreuse.

Margaret, who was responsive to simplicity, was

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struck by the ingenuousness of the advice, but she shook her head :—

“ I can't tell him yet, because, you see, I had to ask him to marry me—that was hard enough ; and if I told him I was in love with him, I should call that bringing pressure to bear upon him ! I said it was for my country. He is the only man I could ever obey or for whom I have the least respect. If I lose him I shall never find another master ; and if I have no master, I am a lost woman—a lost, wandering, quarrelsome woman ! You are such a help always, dear Mopsle ! I couldn't live without you. You never liked Bertha, did you ? ”

“ Well, ma'am, I never approved of morganatic cousins in the household.”

“ I was sorry for her,” said Margaret. “ You see, her mother made a love-match ! My poor aunt ! ”

“ If you please, your Royal Highness,” said one of the dressers, appearing in the doorway with the bridal wreath and a bodice in her hand—

“ I am coming, I am coming,” said the princess. “ It was a love-match, Mopsle, and the more I see of love the more I am convinced that it is indeed the wrath of the goddess as the Greeks understood it.”

She was about to plunge into a dissertation on the

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nature of this tragic emotion, and the literature she had mastered on the subject, when the Count Rixensart, carrying a bundle of official papers, disturbed the conference.

"If you would sign these papers, ma'am," said he: "we must be ready for all emergencies."

Margaret at once adopted her official manner:

"I read all these last night?"

"Yes, ma'am, they are in order."

"What about the children's feast?" said she, sitting down to the table and signing the documents in a firm style because she was resolved not to appear nervous.

"In the present state of our finances," said Count Rixensart, "with a rebellion threatening, a feast to six thousand orphans is no joke; it will cost several hundreds."

"That doesn't sound much," said Margaret, still signing in her best style, with matchless M's and perfectly formed t's.

"Then the presents afterwards," continued Rixensart; "these plates, ma'am, cost a shilling each."

Margaret paused and picked up a metal plate which stood near the gilt Venus who held up the mirror.

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"What a good likeness of Boris," she exclaimed, "well worth a shilling!"

"But how is it to be done, ma'am? One feast leads to another. It hasn't stopped at the orphans."

"I don't wish it to stop at the orphans. There are the aged, the infirm, and the widows, and the disabled soldiers, and the discharged mariners"—

"But the funds, ma'am? This sort of thing runs into thousands—and this is not the moment for extravagance."

"I will have my own way. You cannot say I am robbing the State if I pay for my own ideas with my own." Here, touching her pearl necklace, she appealed to Mopsle. "How much is this worth, Mopsle?"

"At least £10,000, ma'am," said the baroness.

"Then you can pay for all the expenses out of these," said Margaret, unclasping the necklace and handing it to Rixensart.

"But oh, ma'am, you are so fond of them!" exclaimed Mopsle.

Rixensart, who was weighing the jewels in his left hand, asked quietly—

"Are these to be mortgaged, or sold outright, ma'am?"

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"Sold," said Margaret. "That is all—you may go."

The Baroness D'Albreuse scarcely waited for him to leave the room before she entreated the princess to reconsider her hasty caprice.

"Your heart will ruin you, ma'am. Let me lend the money. I've saved it up; it is in the bank."

"No, you mustn't tempt me; suppose the war comes, then I shan't be able to repay you. I like to make a little sacrifice—haven't I been happy in love? He is so strong, so serious, so brave"—

"Too serious for my taste."

"I never thought of your taste, Mopsle—that is a funny thing! Try to endure him for my sake!"

Then, once more, the dresser, carrying the bridal wreath, the bodice, and a pincushion stuck full of pins, appeared in the doorway.

"If you please, your Royal Highness"—

"I am coming, I am coming," answered Margaret; and this time she kept her word.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH A GALLANT GENTLEMAN IS TWISTED ROUND A VIRTUOUS FINGER

OF all the Royal Family and connections, the Prince Adolf of Nymwegen alone expressed satisfaction at his stepdaughter's marriage. He believed it would answer admirably. He was too shrewd not to perceive the depth of Feldershey's contempt for an ornamental career, and therefore he saw himself, Prince Adolf of Nymwegen, as the ruling power in the kingdom of Siguria. Boris would paint, Margaret would watch him painting, and Prince Adolf would be able to indulge his own passion for intrigue without let or hindrance. An obstinate man, he could only gain real strength and conviction by being opposed, and the warnings, murmurs, and tongue-wagging relative to the dangers of a royal love-match but seemed to make His Royal Highness the more convinced of the security of his plans.

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On the morning of the wedding he was unusually exultant, although he concealed his triumph by giving way to the hypochondria which was his occupation when he had nothing better to do, and his amusement when he was absorbed in serious affairs. Accompanied by Madame von Rauser, a dark, slight, elegant woman, who attracted him by her sympathy and repelled him with her care for her reputation, he walked up and down the corridor outside Margaret's private apartments.

"Oh, this marriage!" he exclaimed: "the fatigue, the responsibility! If I didn't feel as though a rat were gnawing at my brain, and if I hadn't this fearful pain in my eyes, I might almost manage to walk about a little. Just look at my tongue."

"If you could rest now," suggested the Mistress of the Robes.

"Impossible! But these delays are quite wrong. It is very bad taste to keep the Crown Prince of Alberia waiting. He will not go into the chapel until he hears that the bride has absolutely started. How I wish it were all over! Margaret has been such a care to me, and, to be candid, I don't envy Feldershey the job of keeping her in order."

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"Oh, sir, what do you mean?" said Madame von Rauser.

"There is no one so troublesome," continued the prince, "as a good woman with brains. A good stupid woman, I grant you, is a lamb; but a good clever woman is but one degree from the devil himself!" Here he threw her a glance which she might have taken for one of reproach.

"And yet," observed Madame von Rauser thoughtfully, "who could have been a better wife than the dear princess, her mother?"

"My wife," said Prince Adolf, "had every virtue, including docility. But she was not clever, although she understood that a wife's first duty was the duty of obedience. It is impossible for any man to retain his self-respect when a woman disobeys him and defies him. He would far sooner have a faithless wife than an unruly one."

Madame von Rauser held up her hands, shook her head, and actually flushed.

"It is not for me to contradict you, sir," she said, "but it seems to me that a faithless wife is the most disobedient kind of all."

"Don't misunderstand me," said the prince. "Margaret's disobedience is of that open and in-

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solent variety which leaves no room for any sort of doubt as to her intentions. Infidelity, on the other hand, is often open to many doubts: it has to be proved—a most difficult thing; and, until it can be proved, a man may feel tolerably at ease.”

Madame von Rauser pursed up her lips, and said that, as she had never been brought up to consider, and far less accept, modern philosophy on the gravest subjects, she must beg to be excused from offering a remark.

“It is not for me, sir,” she added, “to contradict you, but as a woman I may at least resent in silence such dreadful ideas.”

“You have all the prejudices of a frump,” observed the prince, “and I cannot think how you have kept them.”

“Neither can I!” said Madame von Rauser, “but, no doubt, many of my ideas are due to my good parents, who gave me that strange thing in a Christian country,—a Christian education!”

Prince Adolf smiled, surveyed her figure, which he admired, and pulled at his moustache.

“I know my own lines,” said he, “and so long as you understand them, we need not argue.”

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Then, looking up, he deliberately assumed an expression of extravagant pleasure at the sight of the Countess Rixensart, who stepped out into the corridor after her rather trying interview with Margaret.

"Oh," she said, throwing up her hands in admiration of Prince Adolf's appearance, "oh, sir, how much smarter you look than the bridegroom!"

"Nonsense!" said the prince.

"You are perfect!" said Bertha. "My husband, on the other hand, is nothing but a uniform. Have you seen him? He is raging! Do you like the way my hair is done?"

"You are a perfect sweet!" murmured Prince Adolf, and Madame von Rauser walked away to the window.

"Why doesn't my husband say charming things like that?" asked the Countess Rixensart.

"Oh, a pretty woman is thrown away on Rixensart!"

"He thinks I am thrown away on you!"

"Is he jealous?" asked Adolf, delighted.

Bertha began to giggle, and she made a little face at Madame von Rauser's back, an act of disloyalty

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which Prince Adolf was too human to check. He rather enjoyed it: he called her a wicked little thing, and a dialogue, composed of more or less opprobrious epithets, passed informally between them until they were interrupted by Count Marche, who came in on the brink of tears. It was a very hot day: he had been in charge of all the wedding guests, and although he had taken part in many a hard day's march, this was his first experience of a royal marriage.

"These informal ceremonies are enough to drive any man out of his mind!" he exclaimed. "The dukes never give the least trouble,—they have gone to their places without a murmur,—but some of the duchesses are fighting like tiger-cats! The Grand Duchess of Weben-Heben has gone to her room in hysterics because the Archduchess of Alberg is wearing all her diamonds after promising faithfully that she wouldn't. What is to be done?"

"I can lend the grand duchess my rubies," said Bertha.

"Then go to her; she is in despair"

"A ruby at the right moment is better than crown jewels—at one's banker's!" said the young lady; and with a laugh and a curtsy, she ran in the

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direction of her own room, followed by the grateful Marche.

Madame von Rauser now turned upon Prince Adolf with the question—

“Why do men not see through that creature?”

“Oh, she is a child of nature!”

“Bad nature!”

“No, no; you misunderstand her.”

“The day will come,” said Madame von Rauser mysteriously, “when you will eat those words!”

“I think,” said Prince Adolf, in a freezing manner “that I should now go to Margaret.”

“Sir, may I beg, in the name of a long and tested friendship, the permission to say what I think?”

It has been said that Madame von Rauser had that brunette type of beauty, which, in the opinion of connoisseurs, lasts longer than the blonde's more delicate gold, pink, and white.

“By all means say what you think,” said the prince, adding mentally, that her skin was remarkably good. And she was more than twenty years his junior. “By all means,” he repeated. “You know I value—even when I disagree with—your candour.”

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"Then," said Madame von Rauser, "I wish, sir, I could see this marriage of our beloved princess quite in the same light as yourself."

"Light! what light?" said His Royal Highness, perturbed.

"Lord Feldershey is not the man you take him for, sir. He gave up his career in a fit of temper—a temper, mark you, which lasted for five years; in another temper, which may last much longer, he might become ambitious."

"Don't be subtle, Frederica," exclaimed the prince. "Don't wrap up your idea till it becomes so safe that I can make neither head nor tail of it! What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir," said Madame von Rauser, "that we shall find ourselves under the hardest master we have had for many a long day in Siguria!"

"Nonsense! Women's fancies! Your imagination runs away with you."

"Sir," continued Madame von Rauser, more impressively than ever, "are you a student of the human countenance? Have you noticed Lord Feldershey's mouth and chin? Have you considered his bringing-up and his tastes?"

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"He is a very nice boy," said Prince Adolf, a little shaken, nevertheless.

"Boy!" said Madame von Rauser, "he is a strapping major of dragoons—with several touches of the bully."

"Really," said Prince Adolf, "your way of talking is positively dangerous. I do not think I can allow you to make these charges at random."

"I am not making them at random, sir," said Madame von Rauser. "Lord Feldershey, as a man, may be a very steady man, but, just as you find immoral women amiable, I have found these men of excellent character exceedingly tyrannical in positions of authority."

"So you expect me to believe that poor Boris is a tyrant?" said Prince Adolf, more unhappy than ever; for he was always greatly influenced by Madame von Rauser's opinion: such was his unwilling tribute to chastity coupled with intelligence.

"The woman is right," he would tell himself whenever he found himself alone, and able to be honest.

"Why do you tell me all these things now," he asked, "at the eleventh hour?"

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"Because I have had a divided duty," said Madame von Rauser. "My first duty was to Her Royal Highness, who, I see plainly, is infatuated. I have nothing against Lord Feldershey, who, with all his faults, has a high opinion of good women." At this point Prince Adolf visibly quivered. "I do not feel," continued Madame von Rauser, "that Her Royal Highness could make a better choice, given her peculiar disposition and her tastes. On the other hand, were I asked what I thought about your prospects, sir, in this matter, I should be obliged to say that your great experience of European politics, your brilliant statesmanship, your cautious policy, and your supreme tact in managing the country, would count for little against the mere brute force of the future Prince Consort."

"I do not see it," said Prince Adolf, now trembling. "I wish you would not have these notions. You have almost succeeded in making me dislike the fellow, and you have absolutely spoilt my day. If you had told me all this a month ago"—

"A month ago," said Madame von Rauser, "I found great difficulty in getting so much as a word with your Royal Highness. Your

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Royal Highness's time was very much taken up in breaking in the Countess Rixensart's white ponies."

"Can this be jealousy?" thought Prince Adolf. He tried to think it was jealousy, but, as he walked toward his stepdaughter's apartments for their last interview before the marriage ceremony, he felt a presentiment that his days of authority were drawing to a close.

He found Margaret already in her wedding gown, surrounded by ladies-in-waiting, dressmakers, dressers, and maids.

"I am very nearly ready," said Her Royal Highness.

"I cannot speak—I can say nothing," said Adolf.

"Neither can I!"

"This is a dreadful arrangement. You ought to have started before. And—good heavens!—why are you carrying a bouquet? Unheard of!"

"These flowers came from Berkele," said Margaret. "They were sent to me by Boris's old gardener."

"Very touching!" said Prince Adolf, with a sneer. "But you cannot carry them."

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"I am going to make a new precedent. I think they are lucky."

The Baroness D'Albreuse arranged the veil. Madame von Rauser, who had now entered, took the mirror from the table and held it in front of the princess.

"Now, are you ready?" asked the prince once more; "because there are one or two things I wish to say before this solemn event takes place."

He led her to the window apart from the others, and spoke with great solemnity:—

"You are a self-willed woman and Feldershey is a determined man. One of you must give in, and, if I know anything about men, you will show your wisdom by allowing Feldershey to be the master. I am perfectly ill, my dear girl, and I cannot be eloquent. I don't approve of the marriage—I think it absurd—and although I must offer my hand, please try to support me, because my knees are literally giving way. I think it is time to start."

"Yes," said Margaret faintly, "it is time."

"When you have ruined Siguria," continued her stepfather, "broken your own heart, and exasperated Europe, remember I, foretold the whole thing—

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remember that. Now, please hold my hand firmly ;
I must have more grip."

Five minutes later, they entered the chapel
together: he, her nominal tower of strength; and
she, the nominal ivy.

CHAPTER X

WHICH DESCRIBES A CEREMONY AND THE UNCERÉMONIOUS

DURING Prince Adolf's two last conversations, Count Marche and his aides-de-camp had been engaged in soothing the outraged feelings of certain important peeresses among the wedding guests. They would not go into the chapel by the main door. They swore they had the *entrée*, and the foreign ladies of rank were horrified and interested in the exhibition offered them of English manners in the highest society.

"Surely," exclaimed Lady Amersham, "as the bridegroom's aunt, I have an unquestionable right to very different treatment."

"I will speak," said Lady Addlington to Lady Wimborough. "If you won't assert yourself, I must. Er—er—I understood that I was to sit in the tribune. What is the meaning of this yellow ticket? It says Gallery."

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"It is probably a mistake," said Marche, bowing.

"It is undoubtedly a mistake," insisted Lady Addlington.

"I have known the dear princess ever since she was a tiny mite," bleated Lady Kinnerleigh, a small person who resembled in some way a toy lamb. "She would never wish me, I am sure, to sit anywhere except in the first row of the tribune."

Here the Duchess of Drossett, who was considered a very great beauty, and who was, beyond question, handsome, healthy, and—when she was acknowledged the supreme figure of every occasion—amiable, asserted herself:—

"Can you tell me why Mrs. Bisley is stuck up there in such a splendid place? Who is Mrs. Bisley? Why this fuss about Mrs. Bisley? She must be told to come down. It is disgracefully managed. And where did she get those ropes of pearls?"

"Mrs. Bisley"—began Marche.

Her grace interrupted him.

"On second thoughts, I would rather *not* know where she got those ropes of pearls!"

"Mrs. Bisley was given that place because she is near-sighted," murmured one of the aides.

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The duchess turned upon him, recognised him as the son of a Graf whom she had once met at Munich, gave him a smile of recognition, but observed—

“What nonsense!”

“I am stone deaf,” said Lady Wimborough, who had excited, perhaps, the liveliest interest in the foreign countesses by being dressed in what is called “the picture style.” That is to say, she wore a Romney hat, an Egyptian scarf, a gown of old Japanese embroidery, and an amazing display of paste emeralds and ruby ornaments. Her auburn hair seemed on the point of escaping the hairpins; from time to time she clutched at her flimsy skirts as though they were in danger of falling off.

“I am stone deaf,” she said artlessly. “I shan’t hear a word of the service unless I am in the choir. Isn’t there room for poor little me behind the choir?”

“Yes, isn’t there room for her behind the choir?” said Lady Addlington.

Lady Kinnerleigh could not resist pointing to the astonished Italian and other guests.

“Don’t you hate those foreigners, darling?” she observed, rather loudly, to the duchess; “they are so

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infernally dull, and no earthly use to us. We shall never see them again."

"Perhaps, duchess," said Marche, stepping forward, "you wouldn't mind taking your place now."

"Not next to Mrs. Bisley," said the duchess.

"Certainly not; but, of course, as a great personal friend of Her Royal Highness"—

"What is the difference, pray," interrupted the duchess, "between a friend and a personal friend? And I will not sit next Lady Wimborough. I don't like her deafness."

"I thought, perhaps, next to the grand duchess," said Marche.

"That is better," said her grace. "I don't want to be tiresome, don't you know, but one must, don't you know, now and again—a little protest. One mustn't be too free and easy—the example, don't you know. One must remember the lower orders are always on the lookout for a loophole."

She accepted his arm, and the other ladies followed, until Lady Addlington observed Lady Wimborough disregarding the rules of precedence.

"There goes Ethel," she exclaimed, "er—er—dreadful manners, so pushing. She never knows her place."

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The foreigners who were left were members of the oldest aristocracy in Europe ; one of them, a French duchess, was under the impression that the ladies who had elbowed and pushed out in front of her were the ladies'-maids of Lord Feldershey's relatives. An Italian princess mistook some of the peeresses for *gens* who were not *comme il faut*.

But at last the chapel was filled, and when Margaret entered with Prince Adolf, all other interests were forgotten in the excitement of criticising the bride, estimating the cost of the jewels worn by those present, and wondering whether the princess and Lord Feldershey really cared about each other. The ceremony went, as Lady Amersham observed, "without a hitch," until the bridegroom, having received the ring from the hand of the priest, gave gold and silver to the bride, and said—

"With this ring I thee wed : this gold and silver I give thee : with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow."

Following the custom, he placed the ring first upon the thumb of the left hand of the bride, saying, "In the name of the Father," then upon the second finger, saying, "And of the Son," then upon the third finger, saying, "And of the Holy Ghost," then upon the

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fourth finger, saying, "Amen," and there he left the ring.

After these acts of symbolism were accomplished, the Countess Rixensart was seized with a slight attack of dizziness, and had to be led from the chapel by her husband. He took her out by the private door into the saloon of Les Quatre Saisons, where she at once revived. *

"What on earth is the matter with you?" asked Rixensart.

"I felt so awful," said Bertha; "if I hadn't come out that instant, I should have fainted dead away; and if I had done that, Margaret would have sworn I was trying to make myself more important than the bride."

"Well, are you better?"

"I am all right the moment I am in the air."

Rixensart blinked, suggested that she might like a glass of water, but made no effort to get one.

"I have got to go back, you know," he said presently.

"I don't want you. Please don't make a fuss."

"I think," he said, "you have your stays too tight."

"What nonsense! Anyone would get faint in that stuffy little chapel with the incense and the flowers."

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"It is not half so stuffy as your box at the Opera. You never faint at the Opera."

"One hasn't so many clothes on at the Opera, and the seats are more comfortable; and besides, one can go to sleep at the Opera! Do leave me alone."

"Have you got everything you want?"

"Yes, yes, yes! I have told you so twenty times!"

Inspirations are always described as sudden; they were invariably sudden in Count Rixensart's case.

"Look here," he said, "if you can spot anyone among the guests who will buy these pearls at £10,000, fix it up." And he drew out of his pocket Margaret's famous pearl necklace.

Bertha forgot her languor: animation shone in every feature.

"Does Margaret wish to sell them? What madness!"

"Anything to gain her point! This time she wants the money for her banquets to the poor."

"But pearls—these ought to be kept in the family. I must think about it."

"Yes, think about it, and don't be flighty as usual." With this admonition, he returned to the chapel, while his wife thrust the pearls into the bosom of her tight little bodice.

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Her next movements would have stirred the curiosity of an observer. She tripped on tiptoe to the door of Margaret's apartments, listened, ran back to the chapel door, listened again, peeped over the balcony, and then actually ran to another door which led to the main corridor. Hassell was there. He looked at her, she nodded her head; he beckoned mysteriously, and the lady returned to the centre of the saloon as though she were awaiting a visitor. Hassell ushered in Harry Baverstock.

"Oh, Harry!" exclaimed the countess, holding out her arms; "how foolish you are! how reckless! how mad!"

"All the same," said the young man, embracing her with warmth, "you managed to get here."

"But how?" said Bertha, leading him by the hand to the sofa, "how? By pretending to faint, by running every kind of risk."

"It is as safe as possible," said Baverstock. "When can you meet me?"

"Not in Florence," said Bertha firmly, giving the bow of his necktie a little twist and removing a speck of dust from his incomparable coat.

"Then what is to be done?" said the enamoured gentleman. "I can't go on in this uncertainty."

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"You must wait till we get back to Siguria."

"That means such ages."

"No, it may be sooner than you think. Margaret's honeymoon can't last long. They have news to-day which means war. Lord Feldershey may have to take command at any moment." Here the tender soul nestled closer to Harry and placed her tiny gemmed white hand on his very broad one. "Have you ever played 'Pat-a-cake'?" she asked, with a giggle. And they played "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man" for a second or two. The climax, "Put it in the oven for Harry and me," was a *succès fou*! "That reminds me," she exclaimed, "Margaret wants to sell something for the poor. Do you want to buy me something pretty?"

"Rather!" said Baverstock, whose head was swimming.

Bertha drew the necklace from her bodice.

"These pearls," she said, holding them up.

The young man, controlling a frown, weighed the pearls in his hand, and asked—

"Wouldn't you rather have something nice and fresh from Bond Street?"

"These are historical—they are magnificent!"

"Historical things ain't so much catch as you

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think," said Baverstock moodily. "You must learn to look at market values—what securities will fetch in a hurry, darling pet."

But his darling pet began to look sulky. She moved away; the sweet little hands became rather hard little fists, with which she drummed a mournful tattoo upon her own knees.

"Have 'em if you like, precious," he said hastily.

"They are only £12,000," said Bertha, in a tone of reproach.

"It is robbery," said Baverstock, "but have 'em."

Bertha offered her cheek primly:—

"Darling, generous boy! The moment you get back, send a cheque to the princess with a nice little note."

"I will." He kissed her cheek, and a certain coldness in her discretion made him aware that for £12,000 he could scarcely expect any active demonstration of affection on her part. "This is all very well," he observed, following out his train of thought, "but when shall I see you again, dearest darling?"

"In Siguria," said Bertha.

"Good! I'll be there with my motor, and at the first chance we'll whiz along to the bay, get on the

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yacht, and sail, my angel, before they have time to miss you!"

"To Venice first, and then to Paris. And shall we stop at the Ritz? And then to London—and the house in Carlton House Terrace—and a box at the Opera!"

"Of course, darling."

"And Ascot! And oh, the heavenly things we can do!"

"An ideal life! But while we talk about it, we mustn't miss it. One more kiss. Promise me one thing—you won't throw me over. And you love me, don't you? You will stick to me?"

His impetuosity and fervour almost alarmed the delicate creature.

"Oh, do take care! Don't talk so loud," she said.

But her own protest was overwhelmed in the ringing out of the marriage chimes.

"They are married!" she exclaimed, sinking into his arms, as though she were overcome by emotion. "I am sure I didn't feel half so excited at my own marriage!"

"But swear you will stick to me," said the business-bred Baverstock.

"I'll swear, but it must be in my own way. You

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must trust me. Be careful—there is someone coming now.”

They could hear a murmuring in the chapel, a murmuring in the corridor, and, above all, the swelling notes of the Wedding March.

“Oh, why did you come?” she called, in terror. “We shall be ruined!”

“Oh, I’ll brazen it out and face the guests,” said Baverstock. “They won’t notice me.”

“But they will,” said Bertha; “they know every single person present. They are coming from the chapel now. All you can do is this,” she said, pointing to Margaret’s room—“go in there.”

“Why not the balcony?” said Baverstock.

“The sentry is there,” said Bertha, wringing her hands.

“I’ll square the sentry.”

She stamped her foot.

“No, don’t interfere! I must do that. All you can do is this. You must go in there. The moment you hear anyone coming in, slip out of the window on to the balcony, watch your chance, then go straight along to the pavilion. I’ll be there waiting for you, and will let you out. The only danger is during the next ten minutes, and

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the danger of that is fearful. Go—go—make haste!”

She pushed him into the room, and rushed away down the corridor. A moment later the chapel doors were thrown open, and the bride and bridegroom entered hand in hand.

CHAPTER XI

WHICH DESCRIBES SOME UNUSUAL LOVE-MAKING

THE bride wore a gown of white and silver, with a train of beautiful silver embroidery and a magnificent lace veil over two hundred years old. She had been pale before the ceremony, now she was slightly flushed ; whereas Lord Feldershey, who had been flushed before the ceremony, was now morbidly pale. The chapel doors had no sooner been closed behind them than his countenance, which had been officially amiable during the service and the procession down the aisle, became severe. They were both visibly embarrassed, and when a band began to play beneath the window, they were both relieved to have the silence broken.

“What is that?” said Feldershey.

“It is a serenade,” said his wife. “How charming of them ! I think we ought to show ourselves.”

Hand in hand they went to the window together, and bowed from the balcony to the crowd which had assembled below. At the sight of the newly married

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couple, the spectators clapped for joy in the Italian manner, and shouted *bravas* and *bravissimos* for the Principessa Margherita and Il Principe. The happy pair were then offered a second welcome diversion by the entrance of Prince Adolf, who hurried in to congratulate them heartily. Toward Lord Feldershey his manner was studiously paternal and authoritative. After delivering a certain number of pretty speeches, and brushing away some imaginary tears (which he wished to be regarded as furtive) from his fierce black eyes, he said he would have to look after the various other princes and the grand dukes.

"Marche tells me," he added, "that they have been so tiresome about their seats in the chapel, that I dare not think what they will be at the luncheon table. If you take my advice, you will both rest here for a quarter of an hour, and give them time to settle down."

He then hastened out, and, for the first time in their experience, the couple were sorry to see him go.

"It doesn't take long to get married, does it?" said Feldershey, looking thoughtfully at Margaret, who sat by herself on the sofa.

"You see," she answered, "the archbishop speaks

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very quickly, and, as you dislike sermons, I told him not to give an address."

"I am glad I was spared a sermon," said Feldershey, with forced indifference. "Thank you!"

"He is such a dear old man."

"Could you see half the people?" asked the bridegroom, after another pause:

"I am afraid I couldn't."

But, as she was in high spirits, she was determined not to be depressed by any amount of bad acting on Feldershey's part. She felt and saw that his manner was artificial, although she knew him too well to waste her wits in endeavouring to discover his secret motive for such an elaborate assumption of carelessness.

"Do you agree with those who think that women always look their worst on their wedding day?" she said. "I have been trying to look nice."

"You have succeeded," said Feldershey, with his first smile. "You look charming."

"Why didn't you say so?"

"Because you knew it."

"No, I didn't; but I wanted *you* to think so."

"How could I help thinking so?" said Feldershey, with real admiration. "Haven't I always thought so?"

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"It is pleasant," murmured Margaret gently, "to be reminded of it."

Feldershey moved a step nearer.

"Oh, you are all children," said he, "spoilt children," and she inferred that he was thinking of women in general.

"You may say what you please," she protested, "but you look much better in your uniform than you did in that hideous blouse. If I had first met you in a blouse, I am not sure that, even for the sake of my country, I could have—even for my country— Well, is it fair to have such a figure as yours and hide it in such a rag?"

"You are still a child in many ways," said Feldershey, softening under the flattery and putting his arm round her waist. "I begin to realise that you belong to me. You are mine—I don't seem able to believe it."

"I believed it," said Margaret ingenuously, "the moment I heard the Wedding March."

Feldershey sat down by her side on the sofa, and gazed with extraordinary earnestness into her face.

"I have no secret from you, Margaret," said he. "There is not a question I would not willingly answer"—

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"There are none I wish to ask; I am not an inquisitive woman."

"Yes, but you are a young and beautiful woman," he said. "It is inconceivable that you have never cared for anyone, and you could never have flirted, whatever it was, it must have been love. Love is in your face; it is written all over you."

"Of course," said Margaret. "How could I have lived through all these troubles—how could I have kept my gaiety for the world and my fears from my people, if I had not had some remembrance, some"—

The remembrance had been of himself, and the love had been for him, but he did not know that, and it pleased her peculiar humour to see that he was becoming jealous of himself.

"Ah, then there was someone," said Feldershey, with an anger and a bitterness in his tone which would have warned her—had she been less reckless and not so innocent—that she was playing on dangerous strings.

"You are jealous of that someone," said Margaret eagerly. "But how foolish of me! How could there be jealousy when there is no love?" and she began to laugh because she was really amused at the com-

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plete success of her irony. "You forget our bargain ; this isn't a love-match," she went on.

She was so certain of his affection for her, and hers for him, that it did not occur to her that such a remark was a blunder. But the essential in conversation of the teasing kind between a man and a woman is that both should know indisputably that they are dancing a dance. Margaret's dance, on this occasion, was to Feldershey a duel. She was throwing garlands while he was ready to hurl knives ; therefore a kind of chill seemed to penetrate her gaiety, and an instinct, which she could not account for, told her that he was, for some reason, displeased. Still, such was her mood and her habitual defiance, that this unexpected effect of her raillery served only to incite her to further psychological adventures of the same indiscreet kind. She became supercilious, looked away, and sighed with such plaintiveness that he took her left hand.

"Oh, take care !" she exclaimed, snatching it away ; "it might come off !" He had touched her wedding ring. "I must put another ring over it : the emerald and diamond, Aunt Frederica's present."

At this, she moved away from him and from the sofa, and, walking to the writing-table, handed him

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the list of wedding presents which Bertha had copied out.

"It is No. 32, I think," she observed, dividing her attention between the mirror and the commemoration plate bearing his own portrait.

Feldershey studied the list with languid interest until he reached the thirty-second line. Then his face grew black as a thunder-cloud.

"Baverstock is written against 32," he said, tightening his lips and throwing down the paper.

"He sent me that sapphire comb," said Margaret.

"What sapphire comb? I never saw it."

"Didn't you? It is very handsome—no doubt because he is such a friend of yours."

"He is no particular friend of mine," said Feldershey, rising from the sofa and walking to the other side of the room.

"I have always understood that he was a great friend of yours," said Margaret. "Certainly, you have known him a long time. I can't think why I didn't show you the comb. I'll go and get it."

"There is no hurry."

"I should like to show it to you."

"I am no judge of these things. These hair ornaments seem to me Fijian—a remnant of barbarism."

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"Ah, but this is really beautiful. I think it suits me. I thought of wearing it to-day, but I changed my mind."

"I am glad you did."

"But you haven't seen it. It is one of Boucheron's."

"Who is Boucheron?"

"Oh, you must know!"

"You can't expect me to remember all the jewellers in Paris."

"You see you did know! How affected you are!"

It was perhaps a misfortune that they were both profound and devout sentimentalists. Each was perpetually on the defensive with the other. Where one only of any two is sentimental, intercourse is easy, because the more unabashed the companion the less restrained are the acutely fastidious in thought and feeling. This is why poets have loved cooks, and cooks have adored poets. A woman of coarse fibre would have grated on Feldershey's taste, but she would never have been able to drive him to excesses of almost brutal antagonism. He did not know that Margaret's manner was artificial with him because it sprang naturally enough from her sense of being, so far as their relations were concerned, in a false position. And, in a false position, it is impossible for an honest

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woman to be anything in the world except as admirably artificial as her gifts will allow. The poor princess, who was much to be pitied, always spoke the truth, but in such a way that she often seemed to be uttering unrealities: she was, indeed, at a very cruel disadvantage—a fact of which she was ever conscious, and had she not been sustained by a secret faith in Feldershey's heart, she would not have persevered for one hour in her hope of working out their common salvation. She comforted herself by believing that she knew her man; and even when he appeared at his worst, she had the talent of remembering him, with vehemence, at his best. This talent is the peculiar talent of the wife-woman—a type differing from every other whether married or single—for many of the married are not wife-women by any means. In justice to men, it should be eternally borne in mind that any deep knowledge of really virtuous women can never be otherwise than restricted: for instance, if a man marries three times, and each time a Penelope, he may thus become well acquainted with three patterns of chastity coupled with uncommon beauty and sense. But whereas mistress-women are much alike and soon mastered, even in the character of wives, wife-women are full

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of surprises, even in the character of mistresses, and as hard to understand as the Sphinx. Of the latter variety, we have two famous examples in Heloise and La Vallière. Feldershey never tried to understand his own mother: he regarded her as a creature apart from the usual blend of flesh and blood and spirit. He knew her ways, wondered at them, accepted them. He did not, however, propose to take Margaret blindly on trust. Oh no!

"Was an invitation sent to Baverstock?" he asked, with assumed lightness.

"For the wedding?"

"Yes."

"He is away, you know. He has gone back to England. I'll get the comb. Men always think that women exaggerate. It is really a magnificent present, far lovelier than anything the Empress sent."

She went, as she spoke, into her room, and Feldershey, after hesitating a moment, was about to follow her, when he caught sight of a man creeping along the balcony.

"What are you doing there?" shouted Feldershey.

"Hush!—Don't speak to me."

Feldershey now recognised him:

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"Baverstock! What are you doing there?" he shouted again.

"For Heaven's sake don't ask me now. It is simply life and death!"

"I'm not going to be put off that way!"

"I tell you there is a woman at stake—won't that satisfy you?"

"For God's sake, what woman?"

"I would sooner blow my brains out than tell you," said Harry; and, making a signal to some unseen individual, he darted away.

Feldershey was now in such a fury, that, if Margaret herself had not returned then and there, he would have pursued Baverstock, discovered Bertha waiting in the pavilion, and learnt the whole story. But Margaret wore such an ingenuous expression; she seemed so ignorant of the undeniable fact that Baverstock had just left her room, that Feldershey, with the injustice of jealousy, suspected she had been born a consummate liar. He had seen Baverstock by a slight accident only. If Feldershey had followed Margaret immediately, or if he had opened the door for her—which he must have done if she had not gone out in an abrupt, unexpected way—he would never have seen Baverstock at all. The move had

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been daring but well planned. For the daring, there was, no doubt, some extreme necessity. These various points did not occur to him on the spot, but his military training had taught him to take in a situation, rightly or wrongly, at a glance, and to act, rightly or wrongly, but instantaneously, on the first impulse prompted by his conclusion.

"They have put it away. I can't find the thing," said Margaret.

She seemed pale, he thought; she had, as a matter of fact, seized the opportunity to cool her cheeks with a powder puff. A harmless preparation of Messrs. Roger & Gallet's—which comes faintly scented in little boxes—was thus mistaken for the pallor of guilt.

"Was anybody there?" asked Feldershey.

"No; they have all been watching the wedding, I think."

"I could have sworn I heard someone in there," he said, watching her.

"You made a mistake."

"That is very amusing," he replied, with an ironical laugh. "And that is all you have to say?"

"Of course."

"You have nothing to tell me?"

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"Nothing."

"Nothing of the love which you say came into your life, and"—

"You see," said Margaret, a little piqued, "I put love under the general heading of disappointments."

"You have nothing to tell me of the men you disappointed, or of the men who disappointed you?" said Feldershey, unconsciously looking toward the balcony.

"No, nothing," said Margaret, smiling; for she was wondering whether he himself had not disappointed her a little.

"If you would only tell me," persisted Feldershey; "why don't you confide in me?"

"I have nothing to tell," she said lightly, "nothing, at least, that you ought to hear—now."

It was possible, nevertheless, that she might have said more had not Marche entered with a letter in his hand.

"A note from Mr. Baverstock, ma'am. He brought it personally. It is marked 'Urgent,' and Count Rixensart thought your Royal Highness should see it at once."

Margaret, who was filled with astonishment, exclaimed—

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"I thought Mr. Baverstock was in England! You say he brought it himself? Put it on the table."

She was really alarmed lest the letter should contain some reference to Bertha, for she thought it highly undesirable that Lord Feldershey should form a bad impression of her near woman relatives. She believed in Bertha's innocence, but she had too great an experience of the world to hope that Lord Feldershey, or any other man, would accept readily the idea of a strictly Platonic relation being maintained between Harry Baverstock and any very pretty young married woman. Margaret's view rested on her own theory that the least scrupulous libertine must be moral if his women friends do not allow him any other alternative. She thought Bertha giddy, but too shrewd, apart from higher considerations, to compromise her reputation by any reckless intrigue. Feldershey, who was becoming more cunning hourly in observing the changes in Margaret's expression, discerned in her slight embarrassment on receiving Baverstock's letter a fresh proof of an agitated conscience.

"Why not read it?" he said.

"There is no hurry," answered Margaret.

Feldershey strode over to the table, picked up the

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letter, and gave it to her with an unmistakable air of command.

"After all," Margaret thought to herself, "why should I annoy him about Bertha's affairs? It really is not good enough."

So she broke the seal and read the note, which informed her that he was on the point of placing with her bankers £12,000 for her pearl necklace. She coloured to the roots of her hair, for the last thing she wanted was to let Lord Feldershey know that she had sold any of her jewels in order to give a festival for their wedding. She tore the note into fragments, and could find nothing better to say than—

"It is nothing."

"Men don't write to you about nothing," said Lord Feldershey.

"It is a private matter," she said haughtily.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, shutting his teeth in a way she disliked, and walking straight away.

"Why are you so strange? What has come into your head?" she asked.

"I have told you," he said, wheeling round. "I have already hinted it many times, in the hope that you would speak of your own accord. You still

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refuse—very well. I could wring it out of you—if I chose, I could face you with the facts.”

“Facts! What are you talking about?”

“Remember then: I have waited; I have been patient. I thought, each day, as she knows me better, she will see that she can depend upon me; but no!”

“I don’t understand you. I can’t think of anything to say. You frighten^e me: everybody else speaks so differently to me.”

“I am, perhaps, your first experience of a man who will not fall in with intrigue and conspiracy.”

“Intrigue! Conspiracy!”

“Once more, will you be frank, and trust me?”

“There is nothing to tell.”

“I *know* there is something!”

“How dare you say that?”

“Dare! I will not be deceived. I will not have you look at me and tell me not to believe the evidence of my own senses.”

“Of what do you suspect me? Why have you got this sudden suspicion?”

“It is not sudden. I have had it ever since that day you came to find me after five years of silence. That day, Margaret, I had a suspicion which was almost a certainty—and now to-day” —

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"To-day," she said blankly, almost on the point of tears, "when I wanted to have one really happy day—one utterly selfish, happy day!"

"I can face life, and I can face death, but I will not bear an insult to my intelligence."

"How can you say such things to me? It is unendurable!"

"If you will be frank and trust me, you shall never regret it; if you defy me, you will find me the devil!"

"This is madness—an obsession!"

"Oh, I will fight your battles, but between us there will be ice—eternal ice! I will have the truth."

Some singers under the window struck up a serenade, and the unhappy lady, obedient to the habits of her life, went up to the window, bowed, smiled charmingly, and then returned again to Feldershey, whom she now faced with a countenance which required no powder to make it ashen. Her own temper was now fully roused.

"Hector soldiers," she said, "not me. I don't care what you think—I don't know what you suspect or what you say you know. As for me, I must be dreaming!"

CHAPTER XII

WHICH IS NOT TENDER

MEANWHILE, on the other side of the door, in the corridor, Count Marche and Captain Bernstein were talking in great agitation. Bernstein wore his travelling clothes, and was evidently exhausted. He had just returned from the capital of Siguria.

"Then you think the news is really serious?" said Marche.

"When the Government go to the expense of a special train," said Bernstein, "and I have been travelling with a luncheon basket, without stopping day or night for three days, you can be pretty certain there is no time to be lost. The marriage with Feldershey has taken place in the very nick of time. He is the man they want."

"I suppose it is only a little local insurrection?" said Marche. "The whole affair can be stopped in half an hour?"

"No; they mean business this time. They are all

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armed to the teeth. They have got some madman at their head: he has brought in a lot of religion. They won't take money and they won't listen to reason."

"H.R.H. won't care for this news, you know, coming just on her wedding day," said Marche, rubbing his forehead. "It isn't exactly pleasant, is it?"

"She knew it was coming," said Bernstein. "But, look here, so long as I must wait, can't you get me something to eat? I've brought my message, and the rest is entirely with H.R.H. It has nothing to do with me. I've done my duty, and I suppose I may consider myself a bit now."

"You can come to my room, if you like," said Marche, "and you shall have something at once. It isn't a bit of use jumping on her with a lot of despatches before they have had luncheon. It is bad taste."

"Well," said Bernstein, "as she has this private property, I wonder she doesn't chuck Siguria and enjoy a little peace and quiet."

The two men turned on their heels and were continuing discussing the subject in a low voice, when Count Rixensart, carrying a despatch box, came hurrying toward them down the corridor.

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"Here is a nice business," said he. "H.R.H. must be informed at once, or there will be the very devil to pay."

"Couldn't the news be kept from her till to-morrow?" asked Marche.

"Till to - morrow!" exclaimed Rixensart indignantly. "You must be out of your mind! The news is grave, very grave. We needn't say so to everybody, but we can't bury our heads like a parcel of d——d ostriches!"

At the moment, therefore, that Margaret was saying to Feldershey—

"As for me, I must be dreaming," Count Rixensart, without much ceremony, burst in upon them.

"Ma'am, here is a special messenger," he exclaimed. "It is most pressing."

He placed on the table the despatch box, which Margaret opened with trembling hands. She took out a letter and read it.

"There is a sudden rising in the hills," she said, in a husky voice. "They want you, Boris; they want you."

"I am glad of that," said Feldershey.

"They chose this moment because they thought

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we should be most unprepared," she said. "They want you now."

"I am here—ready."

"There is danger."

"So much the better."

The princess turned to Rixensart—

"Order the horses—and a special train."

Feldershey placed his hand on her shoulder and dismissed Rixensart, a signal which the Master of the Horse obeyed with a deferential bow. He had made up his mind to show the Prince Consort every possible respect.

"I must give orders for this affair," said Feldershey, after Rixensart had gone. "That is my part. I didn't think it would come so soon; but I am glad to go. I shall be again in the old rush and excitement. And yet—remember this—that whatever I do, it will be done for *you*. I wouldn't go back to that life for ten thousand devils—and yet I do it gladly to please one woman!"

"I suppose so," said Margaret mechanically.

"If I am successful, you know, we shall leave *this* for ever. That was your promise."

"I am not going to break it—although you don't make the prospect seem alluring!"

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"We could be so happy if you would only speak out, but with this barrier between us"—

"I don't understand—I shall never understand. I cannot believe that I am awake."

"Still so determined," he said sadly. "Margaret, I warn you, if you want cynicism, you shall have it. But I shan't give in easily. I won't leave one stone unturned to get the truth from your lips. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Margaret.

She gave him her hand, which he barely touched, although he bent over it; then he walked swiftly away. She remembered that she still had to meet all the guests, thank them for their presents, keep up a radiant countenance, and blush under a fire of congratulations. Ten minutes passed. She remained just where he had left her. Then her pulse seemed to beat again, and she paced the floor until the sound of horses' hoofs in the courtyard made her rush to the balcony. Feldershey had already mounted his horse; Bernstein and Rixensart rode by his side. He did not look back once, and she did not wave, nor make any sign that she was watching him. This was how Lord Feldershey left for the war, and the princess's heart was almost broken.

CHAPTER XIII

WHICH DESCRIBES SOME HIGH THINKING DURING THE SMALL HOURS

"GOOD heavens! ma'am, are you ill?" said the Baroness D'Albreuse, coming on to the balcony, where the princess remained as though she were in a trance.

"No," said Margaret, rousing herself. "I am not ill. What have you got? Telegrams?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"From the Queen," said Margaret, taking them,—
"from the Empress—from Aunt Frederica—from Aunt Clementina—from the Emperor—all most charming. He is gone, Mopsle!"

"Who, ma'am?"

"Boris. No one must know yet. You can call up the relatives and special guests, and, after he is well on his way, they can know everything."

"But what is the matter, ma'am?" said the baroness. "I don't understand."

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"The hill men are swarming down into Siguria," said the princess. "There will be more massacres. Isn't it frightful? What is to be done? Suppose he is killed!"

"I will order a novena said for him at once," said Mopsle, "a special one at that little convent at Kuntzberg. I have never known a novena at Kuntzberg to fail."

The princess clutched her hand, and the two trembling creatures made their way to the blue drawing-room, where they at once assumed a court manner, and the guests crowded round the princess, who was charmingly gracious.

She said, at least one hundred times, with precisely the same smile, and precisely the same tone and the same inclination of the head—

"Thank you so much for your beautiful present; you will see it among the other presents in the yellow drawing-room."

It was a triumph of deportment. A string band played the Preis-lied from the *MeisterSingers*, a selection from *Don Giovanni*, variations on Sigurian folk-songs, the Swing Song from *Véronique*, and a selection from Massenet's *Manon*.

At last Prince Adolf, on behalf of the princess,

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begged the guests to excuse her from playing any further part in the rejoicings, as Lord Feldershey had been unexpectedly summoned to Siguria to take command of Her Royal Highness's troops against the insurrectionists. Great was the excitement of all the relations, the grand dukes and the whole company. What did it mean? What a wedding! What would happen? Was it really a serious business? Perhaps Feldershey would be assassinated: he took his life in his hands. These, and similar murmurs, passed from mouth to mouth, while even the least kind among them were sincerely sorry for the desolate bride. She retired to her room, where she spent the rest of the day and half the night despatching and answering state telegrams and letters. Her composure alarmed the Baroness D'Albreuse and Madame von Rauser, both of whom warned her that such self-command was unnatural, therefore a strain, therefore a state to be followed by a dreadful reaction. At three o'clock in the morning, after she had finally concluded all business and dismissed the sleepy secretaries and the Mistress of the Robes, she exchanged her wedding gown for a loose Chinese wrapper of rose-coloured satin embroidered with golden storks.

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"I am now going to think and wonder why women marry," she said to Mopsle, whom she did not dismiss.

"At this hour?" said Mopsle, who was looking forward to her bed and a dose of trional.

"This is the best hour possible," answered Margaret, "because I have never known my head to be so clear as it is this morning. Shocks either stun one or else wake one. This shock to-day has waked me up, I believe, for life."

"It is nothing but brain excitement. You need a sedative, ma'am."

"Can't you see how calm I am?" asked Margaret; and the baroness was forced to admit that Her Royal Highness had a serenity which no drug ever discovered could produce.

"Sit over there, Mopsle: make yourself comfortable; put that silk thing over your knees, and listen to me. Why do women marry?"

"From mistaken ideas of happiness, ma'am."

"I suppose you have known that all along without thinking," said the princess: "most of us get to know it by suffering. Now suppose a woman marries for companionship. Say she chooses a brilliant man. Who gets his brilliancy?"

"Other people," said Mopsle, without a moment's

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hesitation. "He is with his wife only when he is too tired or too ill to be with anybody else."

"Quite true," said Margaret. "Say she marries for love. Will he understand her?"

"Never," said Mopsle; "and the purer and the deeper her love, the less he will understand her—and I don't care," she added ferociously, "how fine a man he may be. You may love a man's children, but you are a fool to love him. Be kind to him, but never, never depend upon him."

"Where did you learn all this?"

"From my married sister," said Mopsle: "she has seven sons, and she has had two husbands. It does one good to hear her talk."

"Say one marries a protector—a man of action?" suggested the princess.

"When he is not fighting in some way with his fellow-men, he wants to kill poor harmless birds and animals, or travel about like the Wandering Jew. Men of action only go home to sleep, and as they can sleep anywhere with more or less comfort, it seems great waste to offer them a home at all."

"Then, say one marries for the good of one's country?" said the princess, pretending to be amused at her own situation.

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"In that case, ma'am, one is a martyr."

"But a woman cannot stand alone, Mopsle. It is all very well to say, Love children. To have children, one must marry."

"That, ma'am, is the one safe reason for marriage—to have a family, and bring them up as Christians. It is all put down plainly enough in the Prayer-Books and the Marriage Service." •

"But some marriages are childless," said the princess.

"That doesn't affect the intention," said the baroness. "The shocking thing is to marry without the intention, as so many couples nowadays do. No wonder they are all nervous and rickety and old before their time!"

"Ah, there I agree with you," said the princess, "and haven't I done everything in my power to encourage large families among my people? Still, even with a family, one has certain ideals as well as duties. What about romance and poetry and all that?"

"That is all in poetry and story-books," said Mopsle; "it isn't in husbands—unless they happen to write poetry themselves. Even then, I have heard it all goes into the poetry—they live as other men live when they are not writing."

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"It is disheartening!" exclaimed Margaret.

"I, ma'am, was warned in time," said the baroness ;
"but for your Royal Highness it is too late."

"I don't wish you to think me unhappy," said Margaret ; "I am worried, but I regret nothing. Men, after all, were not born to be companions to women ; the men who have charming, thoughtful ways are either effeminate or more fastidious than nine women out of ten. Such men make better friends and lovers than husbands ; as husbands, I have often heard, they are moody and uncertain—if not actually invalidish. One cannot have everything, Mopsle !"

"True," replied Mopsle ; "I remember my sister saying that she fell in love with her first husband when he was dangerously ill, and he was never again so fascinating. She found it impossible to love him in health as well as she did in sickness, but she was too sensible to fret over it. As she said, when a man is at death's door, he is, to all intents and purposes, a spirit, and the poor creature is not to be blamed, when he recovers, and becomes, to all intents and purposes, a brute !"

"According to you and your sister, Mopsle," said the princess, "women are all angels and men are a

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kind of hog! That doesn't seem fair or true. Many women are every bit as detestably selfish as men."

"Such women get on well with them, and suit them," replied Mopsle; "you have too much feeling, too much imagination, and you are far too sensitive to be happy, for long, with any man."

"You make me out a fool, Mopsle. I could be as robust, if I chose, as *Sophia* and *Amelia* in Fielding's novels. Whenever they were puzzled, or at a loss for the right word, they fainted. I wish I could have fainted to-day when Boris left. It would have been so much pleasanter for both of us. I must try to revive some of these old customs."

"Then, ma'am," said Mopsle, "you would have to revive *Tom Jones* and *William Booth*: no one could say that Lord Feldershey bears the least likeness to either of them except in his quick temper."

"He is better educated than they were," said Margaret, "and he has an artist's temperament, which they had not; otherwise I should say there was not much to choose between the three on matters of life and death!"

She did not tell Mopsle then how mortally she had been hurt during her last interview with Feldershey, but she knew herself that he had killed

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something in her affection for him which could never come to life again, never be the same. Perhaps it had been the unreasonable belief that he was utterly unlike every other man that was ever born. His suspicions, moreover, had seemed to her monstrous and beyond a joke. She wished the baroness good-night, saw her out, and then, by herself, cried bitterly. She was the most miserable woman on earth.

“How could you? how could you?” she asked the absent Feldershey between her sobs.

Feldershey, in the wagon-lit on his way to Vienna, was sleeping abominably. But it never occurred to him that he had behaved otherwise than well, and with a sense of what was due to himself. That anything was due to Margaret did not come into his mind. He thought her impossible, and he could not find a single excuse for her conduct. But of one thing he was certain—he would not be twisted round her finger.

CHAPTER XIV

WHICH CONTRASTS ENTHUSIASM WITH THE WANT OF IT

COUNT RIXENSART lost no time in informing his few most intimate friends that he knew the reasons why he had not been ordered to accompany Lord Feldershey on his expedition against the insurrectionists. All the officers on the Staff were mortally jealous of him—Count Rixensart. They would sooner see the country ruined than allow him (Count Rixensart) to save it. As for their attitude toward Lord Feldershey, it was a plain case of taking the devil they didn't know instead of the devil they knew. But they had no choice in the matter. Count Rixensart did not like to say all he feared, yet he ventured to believe that the aforesaid Staff would hinder, and hamper, and cripple, and exasperate, and misrepresent, and disobey—in a word, “do” for his lordship at every turn.

“I am really sorry for him,” said Count Rixensart.

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To Bertha, he said little about professional envies ; on the contrary, he blamed her entirely for the gross slight which he considered he had received from the War Council of Siguria.

“Your extravagance, your levity, and the-number-of-times-a-day-you-change-your-clothes” (the original expression in German is a word of interminable length ending in *lich*) “are my destruction !”

Prince Adolf seized the unsettled moment in Sigurian affairs for an opportunity to pay a long-promised visit to the Emperor, his cousin.

Margaret shut herself up with Lady Feldershey at Santa Fiore. For the fortnight during which the rebellion raged, she never crossed the threshold of her private apartments, and she was engrossed in affairs of State for fifteen hours or more out of the twenty-four each day. Europe at large was not greatly concerned in the campaign, but, on account of Lord Feldershey's English extraction, the English press sent war-correspondents to the scene of action ; and it was the lot of the unhappy lady to read daily the most sickening descriptions—which Feldershey himself spared her—of massacres and bloodshed, of ill-used wounded, mothers and wives driven mad, and children murdered. At the end of the fortnight,

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when peace was restored, the suite expressed themselves greatly shocked at the alteration in the princess's appearance, and her physicians deplored the fact that she took things far too seriously. She returned to Siguria for the proclamation of peace, and arrived there one day before Feldershey, whom she met, after a triumphal procession through the decorated streets, at the railway station. The people cheered, the bands played, many of the soldiers along the line of route dropped with sunstroke or fatigue, and were immediately replaced by others; a number of loyal citizens were injured for life in the struggle to see their beloved monarch in one more new gown and a lovely hat, drawn in a state carriage by the famous thoroughbred ponies. But the utmost amiability prevailed: garlands of artificial roses entwined with the national colours were hanging from every window, and stretched from temporarily erected gilt poles on each side of the road; the whole city and all its inhabitants were in gala attire; the clapping and cheering never ceased, and it was declared that the trade prospects were excellent.

The princess was almost fainting with joy to think that Feldershey was safe, that he had come back; and when the train steamed into the station, and the guns

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were fired, and the royal pair embraced each other on the platform, under a triumphal arch of laurel, myrtle, orange blossoms, and waving banners, the Baroness D'Albreuse and the populace were deeply touched. There must have been, at the lowest estimate, eighteen hundred kodaks taken of the group. But it was an official embrace, although the public did not know this. After the procession, when the two reached home, and the multitude thought that they were talking happily together, his lordship was all ice and granite, without a word, without a look, of affection. They sat with a writing-table between them in her boudoir, and he said :—

“My men had very bad food and shameful boots. I intend to make the devil's own row now the thing is over!”

To which she replied :—

“Don't speak so loud, or the people under the window will hear!”

That is the real history of the meeting, which was certainly wholly different from the charming description of it which appeared in the *Court Gazette*, and a bitter disappointment in comparison with the scene which Her Royal Highness had imagined might conceivably take place. To add to the princess's

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trial of patience, she knew that she was looking her worst. Overwork, sleepless nights, no exercise, and an incessant anxiety, had so affected her health, that it would have been flattery to say that she had the appearance of a person just recovering from a severe illness. She had lost her colour; she had become too slight; and the *beauté de diable*, of which she had once been accused, had given place to a kind of aloofness and proud melancholy. Feldershey, who was struck by these great outward changes, attributed them at once and absolutely to her disastrous passion for Baverstock. As she was a woman, he did not believe that she had given much thought to the war or realised its grimness; he remembered instead Byron's lines, which, ever since they were written, have soothed men's vanity and made mischief between the enamoured—

“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
’Tis woman's whole existence.”

He chose to think that Margaret's whole existence was absorbed in pining for Harry Baverstock. Now she was not one to pine for anybody—not even Feldershey himself—so he was doubly wrong in his view of the situation. But he had wounded her to the soul, and the pain never ceased. She had been harassed

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in every possible way by unfaithful ministers, the intrigues among the members of her council, the state of the country, the condition of the poorer classes, the expenses of the war, and the horrors of the rebellion. So severe and pressing were all these worries, that it had become almost a selfish, if mocking, luxury to her to indulge in her personal fears for Feldershey's safety. In fact, the distress she had suffered on his account had been, for the greater part of the time, subconscious and suppressed, whereas the distress she had felt for her country had been undisguised and incessantly exercised every hour of the day and night—as much in her dreams as in her thoughts. Moreover, she had been obliged to play, in letters and interviews, as many different characters as there were politicians, diplomatists, and scoundrels to be dealt with. If Feldershey, with battalions, was fighting armed fanatics in the hills, she, at Santa Fiore, had been alone, matching her wits against the shrewdest liars, backed by the strongest powers of Europe. The life of an hereditary princess with a rich little country in a fine situation is as hard a life as any woman could lead at the present day, and one would have to be a Begum in order to understand a tenth part of its

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dangers. This being the case, it did not affect her courage, although it destroyed her life, to find Feldershey incomprehensibly and even viciously quarrelsome. She did not know that he was the victim of a fixed idea, and almost out of his mind with jealousy ; that every word she uttered and every line she wrote to him was twisted into evidence against her ; that he stood, as it were, with his back to the wall, resolved to maintain his dignity at every cost. When, therefore, he studied his wife's pale face, he showed no sympathy, and he felt none.

"The crowds were most enthusiastic," said Margaret coldly. "You could not have wished for a better reception."

"They would have been just as pleased," said Feldershey, "if I had been a monkey dancing on a drum to a hand-organ. But don't talk ; you must rest—you look as though you had a headache."

"I worried a great deal while you were away. The hardest battle is always for those who remain behind."

"People say so, but it isn't true," said Feldershey. "War is a disagreeable thing for everybody."

"And in order to make peace, you have to kill ten thousand half-crazy peasants !"

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"The half-crazy peasants have helped to pay for your palace."

"Somebody has to rule over them—somebody has to lead them—somebody must love them."

"No doubt; but they could be led for less, and it costs nothing at all to love them; it is the killing them that is so expensive!"

"I can feel that as well as you, and I want to prevent wars if I can—and yet—you don't believe in me, do you?"

"I have always told you," said Feldershey, "that I cannot pretend to understand women."

She sighed, and dismissed his humour as hopeless.

"There is another ceremony next week," she said presently, "which you will dislike far more than the procession to-day."

"What is that?" said Feldershey.

She threw her head back a little and tightened her lips:—

"My abdication. There are a great many things to arrange. You see we have never had an abdication before; we have no precedent."

"In any case," said Feldershey, "you may be certain that you are setting a fashion which will not

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be followed. It could never be common for a princess to abdicate!"

"The Emperor calls me a madwoman!"

"It is the Emperor's great distinction to express invariably the opinion of the mob!"

"You may be surprised to hear that, apart from my promise, I want to go back with you to the studio," said Margaret, quietly.

Feldershey burst out laughing.

"I know you'll feel the wrench, that you are really loth to say good-bye to it all, although you are such an actress."

"You always say that when you don't want to believe me."

"Oh, well," said Feldershey, embarrassed, "you don't realise yet what an abdication means. If you cling to all this, keep it. I can go to the studio by myself."

"Without me?" said Margaret, as much astonished as hurt.

"You will be out of place there."

"You didn't say that when we made our first bargain—do you remember, in the studio? It seemed so natural then," she added, half smiling and half in tears. "What was it? We were to live on ten shillings a week."

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"We made a mistake, marrying without love," he said impatiently.

"I wonder if we did!"

"There is not even confidence between us."

"Confidence!" she exclaimed.

"You will not be frank with me; you will not tell me the truth."

"The truth!"

"Oh, I saw the difficulties of your position, and I was much flattered up to a certain point to know that you thought I could help you."

"You have helped me."

"Then tell me what you want me to do."

"I don't want you to do anything—but I want to keep my promise."

"Another sacrifice!" said Feldershey bitterly.

"It is no sacrifice."

"No sacrifice?"

"Not at all—never think so."

"Then I need not reproach myself for this step?"

"No."

"It is, in fact, your whim to abdicate?"

"Yes, my whim."

"Suppose you get bored?"

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"Can I be more bored than I am?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders.

"Whose fault is that?"

"Oh, my own, of course. You never really liked me—did you? Or, at least, if you did, it was in spite of yourself."

"Yes, it is in spite of myself," he exclaimed, jumping up and seizing her hands, "and I don't know how much longer this can go on. Some devil has entered into me, and I hate myself, but I can't help it. If you would only say"—

Margaret drew away.

"There is one thing," she said; "we have never *pretended* to be in love with each other."

Before he could recover from the surprise occasioned in him by this remark, she had swept out of the room, and he was left standing in the middle of the floor, saying—with the inconsistency peculiar to himself:—

"Why in the world do you suppose I married you? I *do* love you: why should I pretend to love you?"

But she never heard this.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH SMALL FRY DISCUSS HIGH MATTERS

THE news of the princess's proposed abdication was received at first with utter incredulity, and as the announcement of her intention was officially made the day after the proclamation of peace, no reason could be found for such an act. The President of the Council, who, it was said, would convert the monarchy of Siguria into a republic, had a sufficiently strong faction on his side, and at headquarters—that is to say, in the palace and the Senate Houses—the princess's retirement was regarded as a clever political manœuvre or dodge. People are always glad of a change, and even those whose business it is to quarrel with every measure that is suggested are, of course, delighted when an opportunity is presented for the demonstration of their vigour.

On the morning that the abdication news was in free circulation throughout Europe, Count Rixensart, Captain Bernstein, and Count Marche were sitting in

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an ante-room of the palace discussing the situation. As it was a hot day, Captain Bernstein had provided himself with a glass of sherbet, which he was sipping through two straws, while Count Marche was scribbling in a notebook suggestions, as they occurred to him, for the arrangement of the guests at the abdication ceremony. Rixensart, with his back to both of them, stood staring gloomily out into the courtyard of the palace, where the princess's guards were going through their drill to the admiration of a crowd of nurses, children, and tourists, who assembled every morning outside the gates to hear the military band and watch the soldiers.

"How can you take it all so calmly?" said Bernstein. "We have just recovered from the killing celebrations after the peace. I'm worn to the bone!"

"It is all one to me whether it is a wedding, a coronation, a christening, a jubilee, or an abdication," said Marche. "Get the guests properly seated, and the trick is done."

"But an abdication is much more serious than any christening," said Bernstein. "It is so uncommon. It makes one feel like the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire!"

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"Oh, the Show will go on just the same," said Marche wearily; "the Show always does."

Bernstein added, from a silver bottle on a silver tray by his side, some peach syrup to his sherbet.

"I wish Feldershey were not so set upon renouncing the world. Now he has stopped the revolution, he might as well see things through."

"What can you do with a man who has ideas?" said Rixensart, wheeling round. "Feldershey had a position, and he has won popularity; but he prefers his art life to both, and poverty to anything!"

"These men who have everything never know when they are well off," grumbled Bernstein. "But I'm damned if I can understand H.R.H. Why, why is *she* abdicating? If it is an excuse for a party, it is a damned silly joke."

"Oh, it isn't a joke," said the Master of the Horse.

Bernstein, inspired perhaps by the combined excellence of the syrup and the sherbet, observed, with an air of solemnity:—

"Then there must be something behind this abdication business."

Rixensart looked him up and down, and wondered what he—Count Rixensart—had done to be obliged to consort with such inferior intellects.

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"We all know there is something behind it," said he. "That is the general opinion."

At this point the door was thrown open, and one of Prince Adolf's equerries announced the approach of His Royal Highness. He entered in great agitation, holding in his hand all the morning papers, including the vilest socialistic rags.

"Where is Her Royal Highness?" he asked.

"Her Royal Highness is in the boudoir, sir," said Bernstein.

"Is Lord Feldershey with her?" said Adolf, turning to Marche.

"His Highness is in his room, sir."

"His Highness!" said Adolf. "So I understand he has been called His Highness since the peace—but quite correct. The Russian Grand-Duke Boris was his great-grandfather. Blood royal absolutely—never forget that." He caught hold of Count Rixensart's arm and drew him into a corner. "Is Margaret going mad?" he asked. "I wish I had not stayed so long with the Emperor. I must get the hang of affairs. You should hear the Emperor on the subject of Margaret's marriage. His comments were mordant! And as for this abdication—I seem to be in a nightmare!"

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"I thought you wanted the marriage, sir," said Rixensart drily.

"Yes, because I thought if Margaret were engrossed in domestic affairs she would leave politics to—to"—

"To the right people?"

"Exactly. I would have let her open bazaars, lay foundation stones—that sort of thing—very interesting, and women do it so well. I thought I was safe with Boris, a man who cares nothing about power. Give him a bit of canvas and some paints, and he will sit quietly for hours! I thought he wanted Art and the Home Beautiful, but I find that he has the fighting instincts of a Turk and a passion for domineering."

"He did some pretty sharp fighting during the rebellion," said Rixensart. "It happened to be in a comparatively quiet corner of Europe, but he did a big thing!"

"So they all say," said Adolf thoughtfully.

"A very big thing. That man, if he chose, could be another Bismarck!"

"God forbid!" said Adolf piously. "Is Lord Feldershey popular with the mob?" he asked Marche.

"They are wild about him, sir."

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"They can't print his photographs fast enough for the demand, sir," said Rixensart.

"If he shows himself, they cheer themselves hoarse," continued Marche.

"A popular idol, in fact," said Adolf.

"He treated his men so well, sir—they don't forget kindness," observed Bernstein.

Prince Adolf stroked his chin, patted the breast of his uniform, and took Count Rixensart into another corner.

"Everything has turned out contrary to my expectations. If Margaret carries this absurd business through, I shall be the ex-grand chamberlain of an ex-ruling princess. Insufferable humiliation! We must find some means of preventing this frenetic, this insane step. They are driving me to use my wits, Rixensart. Some of you have doubted that I have any."

"I never doubted them, sir," said Rixensart.

"No, I don't believe you ever did, and I will remember you. The Emperor himself wrote to me this morning. He only writes to a rising market! Perhaps my star is in the ascendant. I'll not forget you, Rixensart." •

A meaning glance passed between the pair. Prince

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Adolf jerked his head in the direction of his own private apartment. Rixensart murmured something loud enough for Marche and Bernstein to hear, to the effect that the bay geldings would perhaps answer His Royal Highness's purpose, and he followed the prince out of the room.

"They are hand and glove together again, ain't they?" said the ingenuous Bernstein. "But I do wish things were more settled. I want to know the future and make my plans."

"So do I," said Marche.

"Oh, it is all very well for you," said Bernstein; "you are a permanent official. It is very different for me. Katerina won't like it if I have to postpone our marriage again."

"You are all for self," said Marche. "I never ~~knew~~ anything like it."

"I can't see," said Bernstein, unmoved, "why H.R.H. can't postpone her abdication till the autumn. I shouldn't mind that at all. To have it now is what I call inconsiderate."

"These people," said Marche confidentially, "never consider anybody except themselves. I don't mind • telling you that I had arranged to go to Paris myself at the end of the month."

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"I can't think," said Bernstein, "why men are such fools as to hang about a court."

Neither of them would have left the court for any earthly consideration, or for the sake of any woman who had ever been born.

CHAPTER XVI

WHICH DESCRIBES THE EFFECTS OF A MOOD ON FURNITURE AND STATESMANSHIP

WHEN Adolf had finished his long private conversation with Count Rixensart, which had ended in the two gentlemen separating, each in the belief that the other was dangerous and ought to be watched, the prince begged an audience with the Princess Margaret. Her Royal Highness had taken to her bed, and was suffering from a nervous headache after the exhaustion of trying on her robes for the abdication ceremony, but she sent word that she would receive her stepfather at once. The state bedroom, which had been especially decorated for the second marriage of the princess's mother, had not been altered. The hangings were of pale blue silk, and the furniture was purely Louis Quatorze—the one monarch, in Prince Adolf's opinion, worthy of the name. There were some lovely Lancrets and a Boucher set in the walls; the chandeliers were

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exquisite; the prie-dieu alone was worth at least four thousand pounds, and the old Missal which adorned it had been illuminated by Fra Angelico himself. The Library at Venice has no finer treasure of the kind. The beautiful china shepherdesses and naked nymphs on the mantelpiece, and the dressing-table, with its gold brushes, hand-mirrors, scent-bottles, and powder-boxes (all left just as they had been used during the late princess's lifetime), brought tears to the widower's eyes as he surveyed them. They were familiar enough as objects, but at certain moments the most familiar things will stir the deepest feelings. Prince Adolf had never been accused of emotionalism, and he was no sentimentalist. Still, he was human; the contrast between his former triumphs as the ruler of the Regent with his present position as the negligible quantity was almost more than he could bear.

"Oh for one day," he thought, "of my dearest Eulalia! What a woman! what a heart!" He sank on the rose-coloured sofa padded with down, and several minutes elapsed before he could recover his self-control or proceed on his way.

For the Princess Margaret did not use that room; the one she preferred was farther down the corridor.

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The corridor itself was filled with Chinese vases, hangings, and curios which had been brought from the East at the time of the Doges. There were also a number of small tabourets on the floor which had been used by the noblest aristocratic ladies of Siguria at the courts of Louis XIV., Louis XV., and Louis XVI. The princess's own apartment had a stone pavement, an orange-wood bedstead with a violet silk counterpane, painted walls, and a hanging brass lamp of austere pattern.

"Mere affectation!" thought the prince, and to a certain extent he was not wrong. The simplicity of the room was the result of a mood which had lasted, at least, a month.

"My dear Margaret," said the prince, "why have you moved here?"

"It is quiet," said Margaret.

"Quiet! Is it a time for quiet?" he asked, taking the one chair, which had a fine design but no cushions. "I must protest once more against your action," he went on, motioning the Baroness D'Albreuse (who had ushered him in) to retire into the corridor. "Where do I come in on this abdication business? Nowhere! I shall be a cypher. I repeat, where do I come in? I repeat, nowhere!"

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To be the ex-Grand Chamberlain of an ex-ruling Princess is a grotesque position, and I will not be grotesque."

"That rests with you, papa," said Margaret, half smiling.

Prince Adolf, finding the chair comfortless, preferred to pace the floor.

"Feldershey is a brute," he continued. "You hurt his vanity when you refused him five years ago. This is his revenge—he is showing Europe that he is your master: he has persuaded you to abdicate."

Margaret sat up in bed, brushed back her hair, which had fallen over her forehead, and stared solemnly at her stepfather.

"I made the promise long before our marriage. He always wished me to go back with him to the studio."

"Comic opera!" said Adolf indignantly. "You and I have our places in this country, and if you are too infatuated with that man to keep your place, I will, at any rate, keep mine."

"But who is interfering with you?"

"I am so resolved to keep my post, such as it is," he went on, with a nervous tremor in his voice,

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"that I will keep it, even if I have to eat my own heart out in the struggle."

"What can you do?" asked Margaret.

"I am no longer very young—I was never a man for war—so long as compromises were possible: I do not declare war, then, Margaret—I declare diplomacy!"

"And I declare neither war, nor diplomacy, nor anger, nor hate. My policy is a policy of love—it has never been anything else. I have been right so far. Boris led my men superbly. They would die for him."

"Yes," said Adolf drily, "he is a very fine specimen of the mounted police."

He hoped she would wince, but she did not.

"I hear," he continued, "that the Privy Council have decided to double the Government grant which they have already voted to Feldershey for his services."

Margaret flushed with pleasure:

"That is very generous of them. But why was I not told this before?"

"I undertook to bring the message to you," said Prince Adolf, stiffly.

"I know he will not accept the grant," said

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Margaret. "On second thoughts, it would be very disagreeable and hard for me to offer it."

"If you urge him with tact," said Adolf cynically, "I think he will see his way to accepting it."

Margaret looked gently into his lined and withered countenance.

"You see," she said, after a pause, "*you* never did understand him."

"If I ever betted with ladies, I would bet fifty to one on his taking the—I forget the exact figures—but I know it is something near two hundred thousand thalers. Their enthusiasm is evidently genuine!"

"He won't touch it," repeated Margaret.

"You are not well enough to judge of the situation," said Prince Adolf. "All this is a mere *crise des nerfs*; but the difference between you and your poor mother is this, that when she had a *crise des nerfs* ~~she~~ she never mistook it for anything else, but you work it into some fantastic conviction, which, if it affected yourself only, would still be sufficiently harmful; unhappily, it affects everybody, and you turn the country upside down by your caprices."

Margaret, to his astonishment, agreed that there was much truth in his observations, but inasmuch as she was sick and tired of the court and the Privy

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Council and the whole *tracas*, she would not remain a week longer than was necessary in her unendurable position.

"Delirium!" murmured Prince Adolf.

"No," said Margaret, "it is not delirium. I must tell you once more that I made an agreement with Feldershey"—

"Oh, it is Feldershey now," interrupted the prince.

Margaret, who had borne his other remarks with extraordinary good nature, now lost her temper.

"I shall call him what I please," she said coldly. "And, after all, why should I justify my actions to you, or, for that matter, to anyone?"

"Do you wish me to carry this message to the Emperor?" asked Prince Adolf.

"I have already written to him to that effect."

Prince Adolf glanced over his shoulder in the direction of the Baroness D'Albreuse, and his expression conveyed a belief that the other side of Margaret's charm was stark, sheer madness. The baroness could not see him, but as he left the apartment—and he considered it wiser to do so—he caught her eyes and repeated his glance with added intensity. She wrung her hands.

Margaret, on finding herself alone, immediately

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sprang out of bed and locked the door. She had been under close observation ever since her marriage; she had been constantly occupied with public affairs; she now determined to deal with her own private thoughts on the subject of Feldershey's temper. But, while she had at last secured a little solitude, she had no desire to muse: her thoughts melted into tears, and she could not think. A subtle, highly-trained woman in her official character, she was simple in her emotions. She cried because she was unhappy, and she was unhappy because she had been unkindly treated. Whether Feldershey had ever really loved her, or whether he loved her no longer, or whether he still loved her, were questions which troubled her less than the actual cruelty of his attitude. When she was not too bruised in her heart to listen to her soul, she believed that he loved her. But at that particular hour he seemed the supremely bitter disappointment of her life.

And if she had been able to analyse and weigh and define her feelings, she would have known no more than that—the man had behaved in an atrocious manner, without consideration for her feelings as a woman, and apparently without the smallest sense of the common courtesies of life. Rudeness on such a

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scale could not be called ungentlemanly—one cannot apply flimsy adverbs to primitive virtues and vices: Feldershey's rudeness was barbarous, and it sprang from a nature which had never been civilised. She wondered how she could make him realise his savage state—for she was too intelligent to believe that he had any serious fear that he was ever at fault. That he meant to be disagreeable; that he meant many of the ill-natured things he said; that he wished to give pain by his questions and remarks, was certain: he was not a fool, and his insults were often deliberate. Had Margaret been guilty, or had she known of his suspicions, she could have found some explanation at any rate of his conduct. But as she was innocent, and as she had no means of following his imagination or the strange chain of evidence in her disfavour, she was altogether bewildered. Wisely, therefore, she made no attempt to invent arguments for or against the offender, and she concentrated her attention on her own course of action.

“If he is uncertain and odious,” she thought, “that is the greater reason why I should keep my word and prove my sincerity. If I fall into a rage, and become spiteful, and pretend to be as callous as he is, he will

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have injured me very much. No ; I shall go on as I began. And as for sentimentality, false or real, I have lived so far without it, and I don't see why I should not continue to do so."

Whereupon she fell into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XVII

WHICH DESCRIBES AN EXHIBITION OF PROPER PRIDE

THE next days passed sadly enough. Feldershey and Margaret seemed on admirable terms in public, but no one believed that they cared much for each other, or that the marriage was more than a polite success.

On the day of the abdication, the princess, accompanied by Mopsle, went to take a last look before the ceremony at the throne-room.

"I have always been so fond of that view," said Margaret, looking out of the window. "I have watched it through tears many times, and now I am going, I want to stay"—

"Then why not stay?" said the baroness, determined to speak her mind.

"How can I stay, when I promised Boris on the day we agreed to marry that I would go back with him to the studio? Everything he has done depended on that."

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"But it is not too late. You can change your mind."

"I might change my mind—I cannot break my word."

"But why not? It is only breaking your word to a man."

"How am I to get through this?" said Margaret, catching hold of the baroness's arm. "Why should I make such a sacrifice for any man? And he doesn't seem to know what a sacrifice it is! This life bores him, and it ought to bore me, but I like it—and I like these: I am afraid I love them." She uncovered her neck, which was covered with the finest of the crown jewels. "I daresay it is foolish to love them; but they are beautiful, and they do make a difference. I can't pretend that I look better without them. I don't! I can't say that I feel better without them. I don't!"

"And yet you are giving them up?"

"Perhaps Boris," said Margaret meditatively, "felt all this when he left his studio for me."

"No man ever feels what a woman feels."

"Perhaps not; but whenever Boris is angry I can imagine what he would be if he wished to be—pleasant. I think he could be extraordinarily pleasant!"

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"The pleasantest man in the world would not be worth your kingdom, your wealth, your power, this great position."

"What is it worth to me if he won't share it?" said Margaret, stamping her foot,—“if I am always alone? The solitude I feel in this court is the saddest, the most desolate of all solitudes. You never see things, Mopsle—you never understand.”

"I have only one prayer."

"What is that?"

"That your husband may never know how much you love him!"

"Ah! that is my prayer too. I believe you do understand, after all."

"Too well!" said the baroness, drying her eyes. "Why can't you love somebody that doesn't matter—who does as he is told, and doesn't make these outrageous demands?"

"Perhaps when I get there alone with him in Venice, it will be different. The life in this court exasperates him: he renounced it all long ago. It is right that the woman should share the man's life—whatever it may be."

"It may be right, but it is highly inconvenient."

"Oh, I can give up the position and the jewels:

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that isn't too hard. The hard thing is to give them up for a man who doesn't love me. You know he doesn't."

She said this without conviction, although she watched the baroness's face.

"Thank God," said Mopsle proudly, "I know nothing about men! To me, every man is a raging lion seeking whom he may devour."

"Well, you know *me*. You know how I suffered during the rebellion?"

"Did I close my eyes for fifteen nights? Did I not read to you, and play the pianola for you, and invent love stories with happy endings till I began to feel that I was a liar even in my sleep! Ah!" she exclaimed, changing her tone to one of supplication, "what do you suppose will happen when you get to Venice? You will be alone with him and quite at his mercy."

"Perhaps he will change, Mopsle. He *must* change when he sees that I have left everything for his sake."

"Ah! you have still the idea that he loves you. You would never risk so much on an uncertainty?"

Margaret knelt down by Mopsle's side, and said:—

"I will tell you a secret. At the time of the public

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embrace at the railway station, his kiss on each of my cheeks was official, but I can still feel the way he held my hand! Nothing merely official could have made such an impression! And, another day, after he had been quite horrible to me, saying, '*Pray consider yourself in every way. Don't on any account alter your plans for me. I am very busy myself. I will not take up your time,*'—after that, I saw he was sorry. He wouldn't say so, but he was wretched—he went out and rode for miles. Marche says he rode like a madman."

The baroness had but one comment to make:—

"Yet you will sacrifice your life to this infuriated monster!"

At this moment Lord Feldershey himself entered, accompanied by two aides-de-camp. He grew pale when he saw Margaret, and he ordered the aides to leave him.

"You are now on your way to the Military Board?" said Margaret nervously.

"Yes," said Feldershey, wishing he did not admire her, and hoping that he had conquered his love for her. He knew, however, that he had not conquered it: it was stronger than ever.

"I have been asked to tell you," she went on, "that

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the Privy Council have voted you a grant of fifty thousand pounds as a mark of their gratitude for restoring peace."

"I am deeply sensible of the generosity of the Privy Council," said Feldershey, "but it is impossible for me to accept the gift."

"But"—began Margaret.

"Please do not press the point," he said sternly. "You put me to the greatest pain, but you cannot alter my determination in the matter."

"I have no wish to press any point upon you," said Margaret, "and your answer shall be conveyed to the Privy Council. But I myself ask you to accept the old key to the city. It is the ancient custom to give it to the Kings of Siguria when they are crowned: it has never yet been given to any conqueror. It is a symbolic thing," she added, awkwardly. "But as the nation will become a republic after my abdication, I wish the last honour I can bestow, as a sovereign, to be given to you."

He looked her straight in the eyes, and said:—

"I am unable to accept any *official* reward for what I offered as purely unofficial service. The little I have been able to do was done entirely as an act of personal devotion to yourself. You know my views,

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and I couldn't bear to be reminded—even by one of your own gifts—of the great difficulties of my position here. But I am detaining you, and you look pale.”

He bowed, kissed her hand, and marched out.

“Oh! I must save myself somehow,” exclaimed Margaret, turning to the baroness, who had been an unwilling spectator of this distressing scene. “If it is a question of his pride against mine, he will find me a great surprise. ‘*I never wish to be reminded of my great difficulties here.*’ He ought not to have said that. I am a woman first, and a princess—a long time afterwards. He ought not to have said it.”

•
“I shivered all over when he refused the key,” said Mopsle. “That was very unkind.”

“Not at all unkind, Mopsle: it was my own fault.”

“Your fault, ma’am?”

“I ought to have remembered his convictions. I thought it extremely fine of him to refuse the key! I didn't expect the refusal—but it was right. What is so admirable as consistency! In a woman, I admit, it is grim and out of place; in a man, it is noble! But does he think I wish to flatter and please him?”

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"But don't you wish to please him?" asked the baroness, naïvely.

"He must never know that—never! It is such a secret that it won't even be found written on my heart when I am dead!" She went up to the Throne and sat down on the lowest step.

"Men are right to be vain," said the baroness: "I cannot blame them. But I can see that His Highness loves you. He shows it."

"How?"

"His eyes never leave you."

"That proves nothing," said Margaret, interested.

"He turned deathly pale when he saw you."

"Ah, that was his terrific temper. It is terrific!"

"No, ma'am, that was love."

"I thought you knew nothing about men!"

"I am beginning to notice them, ma'am, since your Royal Highness's marriage. Ah, do let him see that you love him, and forget all this pride for once. Call for him, send for him, ma'am, send for him."

"Perhaps he wouldn't come."

"Oh, he wouldn't dare to refuse."

"He will come out of courtesy, but I don't want him that way."

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"And I don't think, ma'am," said the baroness naively, "that he wants you that way."

"The meeting was to be very short," said Margaret, half yielding.

The baroness opened the door and looked down the corridor.

"His Highness is just coming out of the council room. Let me call him here," she said.

"Wait a moment!"

"He is turning back now. He is stopping to speak to Count Rixensart."

"Call him," said Margaret. "No, don't call him!"

"I needn't call him, ma'am; he is coming."

"I never felt so nervous in my life," said the princess. "I can hear his sword. . . . I begin to hate swords! Tell him I want to see him, in case anybody else stops him."

CHAPTER XVIII

ANOTHER ARGUMENT AGAINST THE DECEPTIVENESS OF EVIDENCE

IF the courtiers and politicians were actively engaged in plotting and counterplotting out of zeal—it must be assumed—for the prosperity of their country, Bertha Rixensart, with the gay egoism of her sex, was earnestly engaged in considering her own welfare. The family resources of the Rixensarts were inconsiderable, and the Rixensart *ménage* depended for its luxuries, amusements, and freedom from care on the very handsome salary and perquisites which the count received as Master of the Horse. Little Bertha could not picture herself deprived of any one of the comforts, to use a generic term, to which she had grown accustomed; and when she weighed the precariousness of the future with Rixensart (deprived of his post) with the solid and abiding attractions (such as a house in Carlton House Terrace, a yacht, and the like) held out by Harry Baverstock, she saw

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that there was no time to be lost. She conceived of an ingenious plan by which Baverstock could gain an entrance into the palace on the very day of the abdication, and it was her intention to escape with him during the ceremony, in the excitement of which she would not be missed, or, if she were missed, no one would take the trouble to look for her. Harry, whom she had kept with much adroitness in the position of one who never is but always to be blest, faithfully carried out her instructions—with this result, that when Lord Feldershey returned to the throne-room, in obedience to the baroness's summons, he ran into Count Marche, who was asking Her Royal Highness whether she would give a private audience to Mr. Baverstock.

"Mr. Baverstock!" said Margaret, who did not conceal her annoyance.

"He has sent an anonymous donation of thirty thousand pounds to the Military Hospital. He begs to be allowed to say good-bye to your Royal Highness. He is going away for a long voyage."

"This isn't the best moment," said Margaret.

"But thirty thousand pounds, your Royal Highness!"

Margaret remembered her wounded men.

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"I will see him at once," she said, "and send for the Countess Rixensart."

Marche departed, and Feldershey, who had been listening to the short interview, could scarcely conceal his indignation. It seemed to him that a crude attempt was being made to hoodwink him, and that he was being treated as a man who would willingly accept the tamer explanation of any ambiguous relationship. His anger was not appeased when Margaret said nervously:—

"When I asked you to come, I thought we could talk quietly. But now— I almost think you ought not to be here."

"You can't see Baverstock alone," said Feldershey.

"But," she said, "he might prefer to see me alone. I mean men hate being thanked before other people. I am really embarrassed myself. This sort of generosity is overwhelming."

"It is," said Feldershey drily: "I could almost call it inexplicable!" and with these words he left her.

Margaret had no time to wonder what he meant, for Bertha entered at that moment.

"You knew that Mr. Baverstock was coming this morning?" said Margaret at once.

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"Is he coming?" exclaimed Bertha, affecting astonishment. "Who said so?"

"He has paid thirty thousand pounds"—said Margaret.

"To see me! How magnificent! And I might have been out!"

"He has given a donation to the Military Hospital. He *pretends* he wants to say good-bye to me! But I am not deceived. I know that you still contrive to meet each other."

"No, no, honestly and truly, we never meet, but"—

"But—but—but!" said Margaret impatiently, seizing her arm, "you manage to write. You have deceived me again. You haven't kept your word."

Bertha winced under her cousin's firm grasp, and her underlip began to quiver.

"You know, dear Margaret," she whimpered, "that I am always frank. Everyone knows everything I am doing, and almost everything I am thinking. You couldn't have expected me to part with dear Harry without some proper understanding, and now that you have had the post-bags locked and sealed, it has been impossible for him to write me a word. If you understood affection, you wouldn't be so

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severe. Of course, the poor fellow has become desperate."

For a moment, Margaret was almost envious of the foolish but demonstrative infatuation which Bertha had been able to rouse in her commonplace lover. And when Baverstock was ushered into the room by Bernstein and Marche, the princess's manner was distant yet not unsympathetic. Madness in love she now considered excusable.

"You have been splendidly generous, Mr. Baverstock," she said, holding out her hand, which the young man kissed.

"It is conscience money, ma'am," he replied. "I have been uncomfortable ever since I bought my new yacht. I spend too much money on myself."

"The poor soldiers will appreciate the gift. I understand that you are going away for a long voyage?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Baverstock, dropping his eyes; while Bertha, taking out her fine cambric handkerchief, pressed it to her lips.

"It is a pity that you cannot postpone your journey," said Margaret drily, "or you could have attended the ceremony to-day." She was quite aware that Bertha had been trying her utmost to get

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him an invitation. "You have my good wishes for your safe return ;" and so she wished him good-bye.

He kissed her hand again, shook hands with Bertha, and bowed himself out in a way which displayed his figure to great advantage. Margaret thought to herself, "The man is really very good-looking, and he would look superb in a uniform." But she said, turning quickly to Bertha :—

"What is the meaning of all this? What did he give you?"

Bertha, by an instinctive movement, thrust the note into her bosom.

"Only a little note, dear," she said, knowing the folly of attempting to deceive Margaret. "Poor fellow, how he loves me!"

"What is in the letter?" asked her cousin.

"Can't you imagine?" said Bertha, removing a tear from her eyelashes with her little finger. "But perhaps you can't. Boris isn't a good letter-writer, is he? At least, I shouldn't think he was."

"You—what do you know about Boris's letters?" said Margaret with scorn; and Bertha's apparently innocent remark so exasperated the princess, that, without a further word, she swept out of the room.

Bertha tore open Baverstock's letter and read it

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immediately. Its contents pleased her so much that she danced with joy and clapped her hands. Marche, who had been watching this curious performance, came down from his post at the door of the private apartments, and said:—

“You seem happy enough!”

“I am happy,” she said sentimentally, “because I am going to leave all this soon and think about my soul and my own individuality. We are human beings, and this mediæval official life”—

“Rats!” said Marche. “You love it, and if you thought it had all come to an end you would break your heart!”

Bertha, without perturbation, smiled as an infant smiles:—

“There is no humbug about you,” she said; “that is one reason why I like you.”

CHAPTER XIX

WHICH DESCRIBES A COINCIDENCE AND SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS

FELDERSHEY'S wrath had now reached its ultimate pitch. He thought he had been defied with an effrontery which was as insulting as it was unpardonable, and the case looked so black against Margaret, that his suspicions turned to something fiercer than hatred. Her ingratitude, as it seemed, her folly, her shallowness, and her deceit, were faults he felt, but could not yet name—even in the secrecy and hush of his own mind. Her portrait, painted by Lavery, hung in the corridor. Feldershey stood in front of it, and gazed at the countenance which had baffled him so often. Was she pretty? was she innocent? was she cunning? was she false? was she human, or was she a creature apart from all other women? was she some re-incarnation of the Sphinx? was she one of those enchanted witches of primordial legend who were transformed

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at fixed seasons from delicate beings into wild beasts and carrion birds? What was the old story, he had once read, of the beautiful wife who became a wolf against her will, and prowled evilly through the country side on dark nights? Was Margaret one of these accursed souls, half devil and half divine, who suffer in themselves as much woe as they cause in others? Fantastic as they were, he could bear these painful imaginings no longer. He turned on his heels, and went back to the throne-room, where he intended to confront Margaret finally, and put an end to a situation which had become too acute to be endured. But Margaret had already retired. He found Bertha alone, thinking about her elopement and twisting the curls on her forehead.

"Margaret has gone to her room," said she. "She is dreadfully upset. She was so much touched by Harry Baverstock's generosity. It showed such disinterested affection."

"Disinterested!" exclaimed Feldershey. He checked himself, however, for he was loyal in spite of his inward despair. "I haven't had a chance to thank you for the charming letters you wrote me while I was away," he said.

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Before leaving Santa Fiore on his wedding-day, he had asked her to write to him constantly about Margaret. He wanted to know all about her from a third person, he had said. Bertha had written clever little compositions in an infantile style—describing the worries of the princess and her marvellous self-control. “*She never cries, or anything,*” she had said: “*she is so aloof and wrapt up in her work. What a wonderful woman! She does not seem to need love or pity or sympathy. How I envy her.*” This strain had been varied. Once she wrote: “*Margaret is in wonderful spirits this evening, and talked and laughed with all of us. She has some new dresses, too, and new clothes always make her good-tempered. I don't mean that she is vain. I have worn the same gown almost ever since you left, till the others are tired of it, and my maid says it is shabby.*” Touches of that kind were not infrequent, and they were always adroit—given the simplicity of the man to whom the notes were addressed.

“I was hoping you had destroyed my silly journal—it was a journal, wasn't it?” said Bertha.

“I haven't destroyed it. You told me all I wanted to hear about Margaret.”

Bertha sidled up to him, and lifted her eyes to his

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knit eyebrows. She was rather afraid of his direct cold glance.

"Promise me," said she, "that you will always, always think well of me."

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked, much astonished at her plaintive tone.

"I don't know, but I do want your good opinion. People may say I am artificial and insincere. Of course this life would ruin any woman. It is so hard to be a subordinate to a flesh-and-blood equal! I grind my teeth when I have to stand about till I am told I may sit down. That isn't all. I am fond of luxury and glamour and gilt and lots of money. So don't think me better than I am, and yet—please, never think hardly of your poor little friend. I am not heartless: I wish I were. Let us say good-bye here. It will be too terrible later. I haven't dear Margaret's iron nerves. I should break down and be ridiculous. So good-bye, dear Boris. Perhaps we shall never meet again—to talk properly."

She stood on tiptoe, swayed gently toward him, and inclined her head toward his lips. The movement was so childish, affecting, and guileless, that Felder-she kissed one of her feathery curls.

"This is all nonsense," said he, "about our

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never seeing each other again! Good-bye, little girl."

"Good-bye," she said, and sobbed. She dropped Baverstock's note as she ran away, and with a gasp of terror she stooped and picked it up. Feldershey did not notice her: before she had crossed the threshold of the room, she had passed out of his life.

But, by an unhappy accident, Margaret had entered the tribune just over the Throne at the time when Bertha stood on tiptoe to be kissed good-bye. The spectacle of this farewell was such a shock to the Princess that she actually lost control of her limbs, and, although she did not faint, she sank to the floor and felt herself a dead woman. It had been her intention to hang with her own hands some embroideries and old banners over the tribune rail—for she had inherited from her mother many of the classic instincts of housewifery, and in her ways she was as simply domestic as Homer's Nausicaa and Penelope. She had been known to arrange all the flowers on the supper-table for a state ball, and she often trimmed her own hats. This primitive naturalness, while it was a charm, made her the more susceptible to primitive emotions. When she felt, she felt with her whole body, and her mind had no

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part in her sensations. Jealousy, grief, happiness, and apprehensions were, with her, purely physical things: she never thought about them: her thoughts were reserved for, and concentrated upon, abstract ideas. The effect of jealousy in her, therefore, was not a rage but an illness. She managed to return to her room, and she remained passive, absent-minded, and almost paralysed while the preparations for the abdication ceremony went on. She herself seemed to be vanishing into space, and the world seemed to be receding into an ocean of grey mist. Nothing mattered, and she believed she cared no longer for anybody. She saw no joy in living, and she wanted to die—so mortal was her fatigue. “Dust and ashes—dust and ashes—dust and ashes”—were the words which pursued her, as a taunt from a voice speaking close to her ear, and from which she could not escape.

“Her Royal Highness is beginning to regret,” thought the ladies-in-waiting and the dressers. “She sees already that she is making a mistake. The man is not worth the sacrifice, because no man is worth such a sacrifice. He will be the first to think her a fool for her pains.” It is possible that these prudent souls were right. The Princess had misgivings—not

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about the renunciation of her rank, but about the value of all the things, whether material or sublime, for which the whole of humanity struggle, scheme, and perish in striving to hold or to secure. It will be seen that her humour for the time was dark, and that a kind of dogged resolution to show firmness now usurped the place of her once valiant hope. She hoped for nothing: she loved no one: she put no faith in any creature. Moods change, and the most dolorous are often remembered with smiles. Yet they never fail to contribute to the heart's great hidden store of misery and disappointment. The princess lived to laugh merrily enough at some of her tragic hours. Such laughter, however, always hurts, and the gayer it is the less one enjoys it.

From time to time that morning Madame von Rauser sent small bulletins to Prince Adolf on the subject of Margaret's temper:—

She is very nervous and irritable.

She has a most curious expression.

She takes no interest in anything we say.

I wish we could have medical advice. I don't like her look.

• At last, she went to the prince, whom she found fuming and yellow.

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"Margaret must be mad to give up her position," he exclaimed, "and for what—for what?"

"A soldier-man," answered the Mistress of the Robes.

"A fanatic! And it isn't because he is a fanatic, or because he is a soldier, but because he is good-looking! I know women."

"If something could destroy Lord Feldershey's influence with H.R.H.!" sighed Madame von Rauser.

"*If*—*something*.' You live upon 'ifs' and 'buts.' Great heavens! I tell you we have reached a definite point."

"And so have I, sir."

"What do you mean? Your mysterious hints will drive me out of my mind. Women are impossible—I detest them."

"I know for a fact," said Madame von Rauser steadily, "that the Countess Rixensart wrote every day to Lord Feldershey while he was at the war."

"Is it possible?"

"It is better that possible—it is the truth."

"I am amazed! But Bertha is most dangerous. She invites one to luncheon to meet people who never turn up—and there one is—alone with her! She knows every dark recess of every conservatory of

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every ballroom in Europe. And now, you say, she is making love to Boris. Monstrous!"

"She wrote openly. The whole court knows it. The only precaution she took was to seal the envelopes! H.R.H. does not know of these letters. If you can disillusion her about Lord Feldershey, you will be cruel only to be kind."

"Disillusion! The man's not guilty. What is a correspondence? Fribble—frabble: nothing!"

"On the surface—nothing," said Madame von Rauser: "to a proud wife—death in the heart. Besides, H.R.H. and His Highness are on the most distant and formal terms."

"Incredible!"

"The *most* formal terms, sir. They must both be truly wretched. She goes to Venice as his housekeeper! Ah, if they would all only realise that *you* are the one man who can govern this country."

"How well you grasp big questions!" murmured the prince.

"Destroy Lord Feldershey's influence over our beloved princess. Let her see the indignity of submitting to his will. He is not worthy of her. She wastes herself—how can I put it? She makes herself

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cheap. He cannot appreciate her noble character. She should leave him to Berthas and minxes."

"What can I do? There's no time to be lost. What can I do?"

"Warn her. Tell her what I have told you. She is low-spirited and chagrined. She will listen quietly."

"I'll make one final effort," said Prince Adolf.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH TWO PRINCES LOSE THEIR TEMPER AND A PRINCESS KEEPS HERS

PRINCE ADOLF passed on to what was called the king's room—a small apartment used by Lord Feldershey and copied from the beautiful *salle d'étude* of François Premier at Chambord. His lordship—or, as he was now called, His Highness—was sitting at the writing-table, but he was not writing. He seemed lost in some gloomy day-dream, and Prince Adolf noticed how grey his hair had grown on the temples, how much deeper the lines were on his countenance, how he had aged at least ten years since the momentous day at the studio in Venice—not so many weeks before. The two men surveyed each other, and Prince Adolf sank with his accustomed languid grace into a chair.

"I want to talk to you with some directness, Boris," said he, and he decided to speak from what he supposed would be taken for his heart.

"What about?" asked Feldershey.

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"Bertha," said Adolf, with a profound sigh.

Feldershey showed his astonishment.

"Bertha!"

"Rixensart is trying to pretend that I have compromised her. I won't say all I fear—desperate men seek desperate remedies. You and I are worth powder and shot."

"What do you mean?"

"I am aware of your correspondence with Bertha," said Adolf confidentially.

"But that is my business, surely."

"Not yours only. It is mine—inasmuch as the husband is sticking pins into me: it is mine also—in so far as it affects poor Margaret."

"You had better take care—you had better mind what you are saying. I warn you I have got a temper."

"So has Margaret. So have I, my dear Boris. And I ask you," he added pompously, "why, in the devil, you pay compromising attentions to a little hussy like Bertha Rixensart? It is dishonourable, it is undignified—it is actually vulgar! As Rixensart seems bent on driving me to some form of self-defence, I have no alternative but to place the matter before Margaret."

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"Do—do!" said Feldershey. "I will call her." His anger was so great that it had all the symptoms of composure. "I won't endure any reign of terror. You are at liberty to tell my wife anything about me that you please. I have only one method with mischief-makers." He called for Count Marche, and ordered him to summon the princess.

"I want to see Her Royal Highness at once," he said: "ask her to come at once."

The peremptoriness of the message, and its observance of the etiquette which the whole court always regarded as something more obligatory than religion, startled Prince Adolf as much as the equerry. They both thought that Feldershey had lost his head, and they both felt certain that the princess would utterly ignore his message. A derisive smile began to play around Adolf's lips, and his whole being seemed to exhale, as it were, insults. As two beasts stare into each other's eyes before they fight *à outrance*, the two men waited in a dreadful silence for Count Marche's return. He returned sooner than they expected: he threw back the doors, and announced:—

"Her Royal Highness."

The princess came as she was when she had been called. She wore the plain white silk under-dress

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which belonged to the abdication ceremonial—(she had decided to follow the precedent of Christina of Sweden): she had thrown an ermine stole over her shoulders, and a lace veil over her hair, which was not yet fully arranged to support the weight of the crown. Her eyes were clear and bright: she had more colour than usual in her cheeks: her spirit was now roused: she knew that she was right and that Boris was in the wrong—so much in the wrong that he had almost destroyed her love for him. It was easy to face him. She remembered the days long before at Berkele Abbey, and all his old letters to her—about his love for her, and his constant thoughts of her, and his longing for her, and his need of her love. And although she had once or twice laughed at him a little, and pretended to fear that his protestations were excessive, she had, nevertheless, in her innermost soul believed him, and staked nothing less than her life, her country, and all her happiness upon his integrity.

“If I once know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that he is treacherous and inconstant,” she thought, “I shall be cured of all my grief. I shall love him no more, and therefore I shall fret no more. I must despise him.”

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Where she despised, her courtesy was always gentle. As she entered the room, Feldershey thought he had never seen her in so tender or so humble a mood. Was it because she had just left Baverstock?

"You sent for me?" she said: "what has happened? what is it?" She saw, at a glance, that Feldershey and her stepfather were on bad terms.

"It concerns me," said Feldershey: "it is some story."

"Some story!" she said, lifting her eyebrows.

"I wish him to tell you," continued Feldershey: "when he goes wrong, I can interrupt him!"

"Very well," said Prince Adolf, enchanted at the success of his plan, "very well. Since he has defied me, Margaret, when I have shown every delicacy and possible consideration—very well, I say,—very well! I have been forced to condemn his conduct in very strong terms. I don't accuse him of anything more serious than indiscretion. He is carrying on a clandestine correspondence with Bertha!"

Margaret's self-possession did not fail her.

"With Bertha!" she said, laughing. "My dear papa, she has heard him swearing, and he frightens

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her. She thinks he has such bad manners. She couldn't understand why I married him."

"They write to each other constantly," repeated Prince Adolf; "but you are such a simpleton—in spite of your cleverness—that any villain whom you choose to fancy can deceive you. He laughs at you in his sleeve—they both laugh at us."

"I don't think they will laugh at me," said Margaret, so quietly that Prince Adolf was confounded.

"Not laugh!" he exclaimed. "You, once the proudest woman in Europe, will trapeze like a beggar-maid after a fanatic! But one might, at any rate, respect a fanatic. Can you respect a heartless, self-seeking man who cares nothing about you, and sacrifices you to the amusement of Europe for the satisfaction of his colossal vanity?"

"You presume too far on your years," said Feldershey, springing to his feet. "I won't stand this."

"I, too, have heard enough, papa," said Margaret.

Prince Adolf, entirely satisfied with his work, drew himself up to his full height, bowed, and went out.

"Margaret," said Feldershey, "if I told you that

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what he said was true—because, in a certain sense, it *is* the truth”—

She looked at him, and her eyes, in spite of their depth, were a blank. He could not understand their expression.

“I know it is the truth,” she said, “but I did not choose to tell him so. I saw you and Bertha together half an hour ago. I saw you kiss her with my own eyes.”

“You saw us saying good-bye,” he stammered, “but if you could have heard what we said”—

“It was not necessary to hear what was said. I saw what took place. You see,” she went on lightly, “if you had been an ordinary man, it would have seemed indiscreet, but quite natural. But you—who renounced courts because of their silliness, and gave up your money, your position, your friends, because you believed they were *waste of time*! You are as ready as any other man to flirt with a pretty woman whom you cannot by any possibility—love.”

“I am glad you see that,” said Feldershey. “I was grateful to her because she wrote to me about you.”

“About *me*!”

“You can read all the letters for yourself.”

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"I don't wish to read them," she said quickly. "And I don't suppose you do care for Bertha—but if it isn't Bertha now, it may some day be someone else. And why? Because in the life of this court there is nothing to sober one! Even if we loved each other, we should have no time for each other. We have only time for other people!"

"I don't admit that. There is no one here for me except yourself."

She looked incredulous, and there was no resentment under her incredulity.

"You have fulfilled your part of the bargain, at any rate," she said.

"Bargain! You ought not to harp on that. You took my part against that man just now. Could you have done it if you had really trusted me? Wouldn't you have shown your disappointment in me? But," he added bitterly, "you are such an actress."

"Haven't I been trained all my life to crush my own heart at every turn?" she said. "Besides, I have to think many times before I show any feeling, and even then I generally decide *not* to show it. Of course, I did believe that you meant all you told me years ago."—

"So I did," he said.

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—“And I was always sincere with you,” she went on, as though she had not heard his assertion. “I can still be always sincere with you; as it is, I prefer to think that you have lost all your old ideas about me. It is better to believe that—if I can—than to be quite certain that you are a liar.”

“A liar!”

“Yes; a man is a liar who tells a woman again and again that he loves her, and then tries to repudiate it by his actions. You had the advantage of me—because I believed you. Can’t you see how I *must* have believed you before I could have acted as I did? I daresay I seemed flippant at times—that was in self-defence. Women are always on the defensive even with the men they love best—most of all, perhaps, with the men they love best. If I ever win in a game, I must win by playing fair. You have not played fair. But you married me—you stopped the rebellion. And now my turn has come.”

“What do you mean?” said Feldershey. “You have never talked like this before.”

“I made you a promise,” said Margaret. “I am going to keep it.”

“Why,” said Feldershey, “should you keep it

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when you think me a liar, and have lost all faith in me?"

"Because," she said, "if I failed because you had failed, I should have contempt for both of us. But I always mean what I say. If I can do nothing else, I can perhaps give you a lesson in sincerity."

He was about to reply, when they were disturbed by a considerable murmuring and the sound of footsteps in the corridor outside.

"Can we never be alone?" exclaimed Feldershey; "can we never have even half an hour's peace?"

"I am glad of the interruption," said Margaret; "to me it is a distraction and a relief. But when they come, we must seem to be happy."

There was a tapping at the door. Feldershey himself opened it, and Marche, who wore an anxious air, begged to know whether Her Royal Highness could grant a short interview with Prince Adolf and some members of the Privy Council. They had a communication to lay before Her Royal Highness.

"If it is important," said Margaret, "I must see them. I will see them here at once."

But Adolf, Count Rixensart, and the three Ministers, who represented the Loyalist party in the Government,

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were already on Marche's heels, and Prince Adolf, followed by the others, burst into the room.

"I have just got a despatch from the Emperor," said he, "a private communication, in which he urges me to use every argument in my power to dissuade you from this calamitous blunder of abdication."

"Half the people haven't got it through their heads yet that your Royal Highness will do it," said the Minister of Finance.

"There's plenty of enthusiasm for your Royal Highness," said the Minister for Commerce.

"If your Royal Highness knows how to use it," cynically observed the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

"Your Royal Highness calls out the best qualities of the best men," said the Minister who had referred to enthusiasm. He wore a self-conscious smile.

"And now your Royal Highness is married, your position is doubly secure," said Count Rixensart, with a flattering glance in Lord Feldershey's direction.

"You misunderstand my attitude," said Margaret. "I am resigning because I have a conviction that it is not the life for me."

Adolf threw up his hands with a gesture of

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impatience: "You were born for it: it is your birth-right. Will you renounce it for a caprice?"

"I am entirely in agreement with the views of my husband, who himself renounced a great deal years ago, when I didn't agree with him. I do agree with him now," said Margaret firmly.

"It will lead to a rebellion," said Rixensart.

"The worst we have had yet," said the Minister of Commerce.

"I have set my face one way, and I will not turn back," said Margaret.

"Are the proceedings to go on?" asked the Minister of Finance, drily.

"Of course they are to go on," said Margaret.

"It is madness!" exclaimed Adolf.

"I am still mistress here," exclaimed Margaret, "and I have given the orders."

The enthusiastic Minister said, in his blandest manner, "Will your Royal Highness not allow"—

"Gentlemen," said Margaret, rising from her chair, "we are already five minutes late."

The Ministers retired with Prince Adolf and Count Rixensart into a corner, and they made no attempt to conceal their dissatisfaction.

"Margaret!" said Feldershey, going up to her.

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"We are already five minutes late," she said, but in a less commanding tone than she had used to the Ministers. She walked out of the room, and the men had no alternative but to fall into the order of their precedence and follow her. Feldershey alone remained behind.

CHAPTER XXI

WHICH IS SHORT BUT IMPORTANT

FOR the first time in his life, Feldershey felt the keen uneasiness of remorse. He wasted no thought on the episode (which seemed to him trivial) with Bertha, but Margaret's words about the old days of his devotion to herself bit into his heart, and he wondered whether he had not given too much power to pride, and paid too little heed to his better instincts. It was the second experience of a forgotten sensation to think of Margaret in any other character than that of a disturbing influence. Had he mistaken a summer breeze for a whirlwind, or a nightingale for a vulture, or a rose for the upas tree? From the beginning, he had utterly misread and mismanaged her: he had approached her always in a vindictive humour — the merciless appetitive humour which sometimes passes for true love. That there are many ways of loving was a rudimentary truth which had, for certain reasons, escaped Felder-

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they's conscience. And the certain reasons for this ignorance were these: he had spent his time among ladies of gay philosophy; he had never encountered the least opposition to his caprices; he had never been driven to consider seriously the nature of his relations with any human being. He had, therefore, a contemptuous estimate of all love-affairs, and, to him, any idealism on the subject seemed incomprehensible. His affection for Margaret had always puzzled and tormented him, for it had thwarted that mania of selfishness which his education had produced, fostered, and glorified. His impulse was the crude male impulse—strong at all the ages of man—to destroy the thing he could not explain. Yet there had been a prelude to his present condition, which, as he now remembered it, seemed more beautiful than anything else in his life. It was the time before he fell, as it is called, in love with Margaret, when he admired her from a distance as one admires a star, or a statue, or a picture, or a pretty child: when he had been able to forget himself entirely in the mere pleasure of seeing her, or being near her. So long as he had been unconscious of himself, he had considered his feelings far indeed from those of a lover: but as time went on, and he became egoistic,

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restless, and bad-tempered, he had no doubt at all of his wishes—much as he resented their power, and in spite of his ingenuity in calling them by other names. A marriage with Margaret seemed impossible—he did not want to marry), still, he asked her to marry him—not in the hope that she would accept his offer, but that she might have some excuse for owning her love for him. He could not be sure that she loved him, and he could not bear the suspense of such an uncertainty. What had her answer been? Neither yea nor nay, but a laugh—a curious, half-mocking, half-indulgent laugh—as though she understood him and forgave him. And understanding, at that moment, was the last thing he wanted, and her forgiveness cut his self-love to the quick. He pretended that he did not mean what she unfortunately thought he meant. At first, she allowed herself, for his sake, to be placed at that disadvantage, but her spirit could not long submit to such an injustice. She uttered her mind plainly: he shrugged his shoulders: it was a triumph of pure love that they remained on speaking terms. Then she went to Siguria, and he resolved to banish her for ever from his thoughts. But, as he could not say, even in his wrath, that he hated her, he owned openly that he

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was quite devoted to her—a form of fealty in which the world, and Margaret, detected a revenge more bitter than the harshest abuse. How long ago and empty all that performance seemed!

“I have been playing the fool,” he thought, “and I have lost her!”

He was not the man to bear losses with a good grace.

The princess was robed as hurriedly for her abdication as she had been dressed for her wedding, but whereas she had been happy and agitated on the latter occasion, she was now unhappy and calm. She had never been so still, and the reluctance which she had feared she might be weak enough to feel in leaving the palace for ever, did not assail her. As she looked at herself for the last time in her crown and regalia, there shone no more for her any brilliancy in diamonds, any lustre in pearls, any colour of the heart in rubies, any magic of love in sapphires, any pomp in the gorgeous livery of rank. She smiled at the notion she had once held of the preciousness of these things.

“And must I smile at Boris too in the same way?” she thought. Tears sprang swiftly to her

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eyes, and the attendants supposed that she was betraying, much against her will, some anguish over the farewell to her material possessions. But she was wondering why Feldershey had not been given a heart more like her own, or why her own was not more callous.

“Amour, à qui je dois et mon mal et mon bien,
Que ne luy donniez-vous un cœur comme le mien,
Ou que n’avez-vous fait le mien comme les autres !”

When she and Feldershey met to join hands for the drive to the Senate House, he was becoming aware that love was a more sacred gift than he had ever supposed it to be, and Margaret had learnt that by renouncing what was artificial she had gained the kingdom of her own soul. The abdication was made first at the Senate House, and afterwards in the throne-room before the assembled court. Although the two ceremonies occupied several hours, they were ended long before it was realised that the princess had fulfilled her promise. No one, from the most experienced to the humblest of her subjects, had believed that the curious precedent of Christina of Sweden would be followed by any modern woman or man. It was a day's wonder—to wonder for the traditional nine days is no longer the fashion. But,

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for a day, Europe was amazed and a little scandalised ; it was hoped that the princess would understand that she could no longer expect any official recognition. She had cut herself adrift from the society of her equals, and her inferiors would find her an embarrassment.

“ She must be mad,” said the Emperor—not for the first time.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CLOCK IS MENDED

LADY FELDERSHEY and her sister, Lady Amersham, had been for some days in Venice, superintending the new decoration of Feldershey's studio. It was now furnished with treasures and hung with tapestries; a staff of competent servants had been engaged, and Lady Feldershey felt able to tell herself that everything was in order. Even the clock in the back of the god Pan had been restored and put in order. The students had raised a small wedding-present fund for that purpose. Every hour, therefore, the flute played a little air.

"I have always said it was the one thing lacking!" said Lady Feldershey. "We had the flute, and Pan—but no music. Now we shall have all three. Perhaps it is a good omen, Helen. Perhaps my boy will have the music in his life which I have always wanted there. He believes in it: he has never heard it!"

"Dear Evelyn," replied Lady Amersham, "you

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are so sentimental! Still, I consider you an heroic woman. I have never moved a finger for my boys, and see how well they have got on. You forget yourself for Boris: Margaret forgets herself for Boris: he takes it all as a matter of course."

"I know, dear, I'm a great silly; but would two such nice women as Margaret and I forget ourselves, as you say, for a worthless man? I assure you he has his own way of making himself loved.—Doesn't this room look charming?"

The windows were open, letting in the moonlight and showing the coloured lamps on the passing gondolas, and the yachts at anchor on the lagoon.

"I wonder what they will think of it all at close quarters," continued Lady Feldershey. "Palaces and riches are not the only disappointing things in the world. One can be terribly disappointed in a life of hardships—they are not always so hard! When romantic young people make up their minds to suffer, and are determined to be unhappy, no ordinary anxiety satisfies them!"

She went round the rooms once more—moving flowers, patting draperies, stroking curtains, adjusting lamp-wicks, lowering candle-shades, and repeating orders already thrice-told to the servants. Then,

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with a deep sigh, she took her sister's arm and left it all.

"Boris won't wish to see me yet," she said; "this is their honeymoon!"

Margaret and Feldershey, meanwhile, were fast approaching Venice. They had left the Sigurian capital by a special train on the night following the abdication, and they had found the journey almost amusing. The two now looked at each other with kinder eyes, and although they were not fully reconciled, although the fire of anger was not yet quite extinguished, although each was still uncertain of the other's temper, they were conscious that the ice between them had melted. Feldershey found himself very lonely in his own saloon, whereas Margaret's saloon seemed far more comfortable. He walked in and out of it several times on various excuses, and as she did not appear to think either his restlessness or his company unwelcome, he remained with her the greater part of the time. At first they did not talk much: she tried to read a book, while he seized the opportunity to watch her face in repose. She was, he decided, a very pretty woman, with a gentle, sad, almost timid expression. The flash was, no doubt, ever ready to kindle in her dark blue eyes, and the

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upper lip, which he rather detested, was no doubt ever ready to smile defiance. Still, the eyes were soft enough now, and the smile was subdued. He could not think that her spirit was broken, but he had heard a whisper at the court to the effect that he had broken her heart. What had he done? how had he been to blame? She looked up once, and coloured under the curious scrutiny of his gaze. But she resumed her reading—the latest success in comedies at the Français. Presently, Fellershey began to speak of Paris, and the plays he had seen, and people he had met. They exchanged opinions and news: they found they agreed absolutely on every subject. He thought her the most soothing, delightful woman he had ever seen: she wondered why she had ever thought him odious.

“And I might have lost her!” he reflected.

“And I might have quarrelled with him irrevocably!” she remembered.

They spoke of the times at Berkele Abbey: how he had first seen her at eleven years of age, in an enormous Leghorn hat trimmed with daisies, and a white lace frock over a blue silk slip. Her hair fell in curls to her waist, and she ran, showing her white silk stockings and small white

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kid shoes, over the lawn, through the woods, across the meadows, disobeying her nurse, terrifying her governess, scaring the pigeons and the peacocks, amazing her tutor. Feldershey caught her and carried her back, because she had kicked off her white shoes stained green with grass and brown with mud. And although she had defied the nurse, the governess, and the tutor, she had smiled sweetly at Feldershey till he brought her safely to the swing on the lawn—where she showed her ingratitude and independence by struggling away and swinging to dangerous heights. Perhaps the recollection of their first meeting had affected his whole idea of her character.

“I thought you were a treacherous little girl,” he confessed.

“And I thought you should have held me tighter,” she said: “I found I could get away from you, and I got away!”

Then, after she had grown up, and her hair was piled up on her head and her gown reached the floor, they had danced together on her eighteenth birthday. She was a graceful dancer, but it made him so furious to see her whirling round with any other man except himself, that he left the ballroom

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and walked alone in the garden, swearing that she had no heart and not so much beauty. Nevertheless, he fell in love with her, and she was so enchanted by his first love-letter, that, although she teased him about it, she carried it in her bosom all day and slept with it under her pillow all night. Gradually, the world at large discovered the romance in the situation: it whispered, "Feldershey is infatuated, and the princess is amusing herself." Prophets declared that she would treat him badly, leave him in the lurch, and ruin his career. It is certain that she did not behave in the common manner of enamoured girls. Perhaps she felt instinctively that his affection then was more fierce than lasting; that it was selfish; that it depended on her appearance and not on her nature. Now, although she was extremely fond of dress and jewels and finery, and although she took much pleasure in admiration, she was, as a lover, an idealist: that is to say, she had calm senses and a passionate heart. Any constitution of the kind, whether in a man or a woman, is foredoomed to acute suffering, perpetual misunderstanding, and a good deal of enmity from the greater number of persons who live by the inverse ratio—a stagnant heart and undisciplined senses.

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"You were always an enigma to me," said Feldershey suddenly. He had not forgotten Baverstock, and he intended to have the Baverstock mystery explained by a lie—if not by the truth.

"She shall give me *some* explanation at any rate," he thought.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CONTENTS OF A LITTLE BOOK IN A DRESSING-CASE

THE princess had brought with her an old journal which she, as a girl, had written at Berkele Abbey. She had promised herself again and again that she would read it, but the fear of reviving innocent ideas, which had now proved painful deceptions, had been greater than her curiosity. The volume remained unlocked and hidden away—the very sight of its cover made her wince. To-night, however, she could not sleep. Feldershey had gone to his own saloon: the regular beat of the carriage wheels lulled her nerves: her heart was less heavy than it had been for ~~many~~ months, and as she knew that she would not be disturbed for several hours, she took the little book from her dressing-case, and opened it for the first time in six years.

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Thus it began :—

Sept. 1, 18—.—Everyone seems pleased with my performance of Kate Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer*, and the theatricals may be called a success. Feldershey, whom I have not seen for ages, is more peculiar than ever, but he walked round the lake with me this morning and praised my acting—an unusual thing for him, because he always finds fault with everybody, *n'importe qui*.

“You must have been very much in love at some time,” said he—“perhaps you are still—to be able to play love scenes as you do.”

“That’s the strange part,” I answered. “I have never been in love at all.”

“Never?” said he, in a rude, astonished way.

I was rather hurt, and I said, “Never,” with much dignity. He forgets himself often, I think. I do not know another man with such bad manners. He did not seem to notice that I was offended, and he went on in the same doubting tone—

“How strange! I thought every girl fell in love any number of times before she was nineteen. You are nineteen and a half. But I don’t suppose that many people, at any age, are in love in the romantic

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way. In most cases, one gets used to someone, and fond of her, and so on. As for me, I am always cold-blooded."

"How many times," I asked, meaning to be sarcastic, "have you thought you were—cold-blooded?"

He never feels irony, and it is wasted upon him.

"Ever so many times," he said, "I have known somebody nice, and I have wondered why I couldn't like her better."

"You remember Browning—

"How is it under our control
To love or not to love?
I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more."

He does not care for poetry: I enjoyed quoting Browning. But he listened thoughtfully, whereas I had expected him to shout—

"Browning is a terror!"

"Yes, that's it," he said: "I get a glorious day, and the sky all it ought to be, and the birds singing, and a very pretty woman, and we are awfully nice to each other, and then—somehow—I could kick myself for not being more pleased. Do you know that feeling?"

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This was too amusing : I had to answer him in his own manner.

"I know it well," said I; "and isn't it disappointing? I have often wondered why I can't fall in love when I wish. I meet clever, handsome, or interesting men every day; no doubt, you meet the most enchanting women constantly, but"— I couldn't finish the sentence well, so I put on the nearest imitation I could manage of his own bored expression. (I do not believe he was bored in reality. He is not free from affectation.)

"I see all the charm, and the good looks"— he said.

"I know," said I, "but if I cannot love, I cannot. Something stops me—something says, 'No, no! this isn't the one!'"

"Half the time one has to persuade one's self into caring—really pull one's self by the ear."

"And reproach one's self," said I sympathetically, "for want of heart."

He gave me one of his sharp, angry glances :

"I have no heart," said he. "I am ashamed to own it."

"We are much alike—in that respect," said I.

"All the same," said he, "when you acted as

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you did last night, it seemed lifelike, it's hard to think it was acting. Hereafter, I could never be quite sure when you were in earnest or when you weren't. That doubt would make me uneasy."

"Off the stage," said I, "I become somebody else—I'm transformed. I don't do what *I* would do; I do what *she* would do—she, the other woman. Perhaps you would call me a mechanism. But here, now, with you, there's no play any more—I am myself."

"I don't believe you," said he.

I was never more angry :

"Do you mean that I am a liar?" said I.

He never answered me. I do not see how I can remain friends with such an uncouth person. I was too thankful that the Duke of Chamford joined us, and talked in a most agreeable way about landscape gardening, the Memoirs of Saint-Simon, and the sonnets of Leonardo da Vinci. Feldershey put on such a supercilious air that I blushed for him. One was almost glad when he left one.

Sept. 5.—I do not want to care too much for anybody. I don't dare; it is too dangerous. I must not. They say that love is the answer to life. That isn't true—*while* you love, at any rate. Afterwards—perhaps. Afterwards, when it is all over. But that is just what

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I fear—the time when it is over. If it never begins, it cannot end. Let me love for a little, then. I say that all day—let it be a little—a little. Don't let me get too serious. I mustn't. Others must be colder than I am: they haven't so much to give—so much to lose. They are self-contained, and they can be perfectly happy alone. I am not happy alone, although there are few people with whom I care to be for any length of time, and to all the rest I do prefer solitude infinitely.

Sept. 7.—Feldershey rode over this morning. He looks his best on a horse. There may be better-looking men from the conventional standpoint, but it is impossible not to admire him. No one could find fault with his expression: he fails in character—not in appearance. I should pity any girl who became attached to him. I am almost certain that he is incapable of any deep love. And yet he makes remarks occasionally, when he is off his guard, which show unexpected depths of feeling. To-day, he tried to be pleasant, and he succeeded. My life has been spent in such a hurricane of insincerities, that I long for some honest friend who sees things as they are, and speaks from his soul. The word *soul* makes Feldershey roar with laughter.

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I wasn't born for realities: they hurt. I want things to be as beautiful as they are in poetry. Feldershey said, "Why do you read such stuff? It makes you artificial. Be natural—be yourself. You're subtle, I know, but that's interesting. I don't ask you to be commonplace. Be what you are."

"What am I?" I asked.

"A real woman! There are women and real women. You are a real woman."

"But I am real in my way, not in your way," I said.

"Only five minutes ago I was trying to think I wasn't in love with you," he said. "I have been in love with you all along, and I never knew it—I swear I didn't. I knew there was no one else like you, and I knew that I was perfectly happy with you. What is to become of us? What is going to happen?"

"Now we are getting too serious," I said. As a matter of fact, I knew he was not so serious as he should have been, and I felt rather hurt. *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*. I dislike this indolent compliment-making, which may mean anything or nothing. It is too easy to believe that one is loved by someone whom one likes. Curiously enough, I had to remind myself quickly that Feldershey was

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not a man who treated love as more than a sort of sport. I don't doubt that he has what is called a fondness for me, but such an easy fondness does not flatter me; on the contrary, it wounds me, because I know that it is worthless.

Sept. 9.—He has written me a letter. I think he must be in earnest after all. But if he isn't—

Sept. 10.—I have seen him. I think he meant every word he wrote in his letter, but he wishes that he had not written it, or meant it. His disposition is ungracious, and it irritates him to find that he can care for anybody except himself. I never asked him to care for me, and I never made the smallest effort to attract him. But I do not want such begrudged love—it humiliates me. I think he would like to wring my neck.

Oct. 30.—I have not written in this 'journal for nearly six weeks. There has been nothing to say. Numbers of guests have come and gone: I may have to return to Siguria. They tell me it will be a hard, anxious life; but I do not mind anxieties, and the less time I have to think about myself as a human being, the happier I shall be. Feldershey and I were wise to quarrel, for he thinks only of pleasure, and the moment, whereas I can never forget pain and

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eternity. I have never had any pain of body, but I have had great pain of mind: I have also known many unhappy people, and seen much suffering. How can I put such knowledge away from me? I hear and read much stuff about the joys of childhood and girlhood. Children are often utterly wretched—because they see so much deceit around them, and are told so many lies. Girls have many sorrowful hours, because they too are told lies, and they meet with disappointments, and make mistakes, and look for a happiness which does not seem to exist at all. No old woman is ever so lonely as a young girl can be. An old woman may know that there are many worse things than loneliness, but a girl thinks that nothing could be so hard to bear. A girl wishes to be loved by someone whom she can adore: an old woman is contented if she can send flowers to a grave and deceive herself about the faults of the dead under the stone. Haven't I seen such cases again and again? It is the young who are broken-hearted—not the middle-aged, not the elderly. When I grow old, I shall be very kind to silly young people, as they are called. They pay, indeed, for all the selfishness of humanity. The Baroness d'Albreuse tells me that no one would guess, to see me in society, that I have such a melan-

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choly mind. But when I am melancholy, I consider it my duty to avoid society. I go out when I am in high spirits—which is often the case. If, however, I am obliged to see people when I am in no humour for them, I force myself to be polite. Is it their fault that I am out of tune? I may not always succeed in acting well: it is my rule, nevertheless, to lose sight of myself and to forget my private thoughts in public.

The parting with Feldershey was almost too quiet to remember. I shed so many tears, and grieved so much, over our first real quarrel, that everything since then has been light. We parted on the most charming, delicate terms, and I was astonished at my own unfeigned serenity. Afterwards, my head ached, and it was difficult to join in conversation. I wanted quiet—utter quiet. I believe it is almost easy to part with anybody, or anything, if one can once see that a break is necessary. The *seeing* this is the terrible hour. One wants to remain blind: one struggles: one argues: one hopes: one lives on falsehoods: one denies one's own infallible instincts. Yet it is all useless and, in vain. I believe that I shall always keep my affection for Feldershey, although he has injured the idyllic part of it—which was the part I wanted to

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keep for ever. It was such a romance to me when I had any worries, any troubles. When I was tired, I would say to myself, "But he is coming; I shall see him soon; or I shall have a letter from him." Just that—it was quite enough. Perhaps the letter would be a note about a horse. Still, it made me happy for hours. Well, that is ended. I shall not be able to think that way any more. I shall not be able to depend upon him any more. I was just beginning to understand: I was just beginning to be glad I was alive: I was just beginning to see the beautiful things in the world. They'll never come back—never, never come back—or, if they do come back, they will not seem the same, and I shall be afraid to trust them.

Nov. 7.—I might quit the world, but the world will not quit its prey. A year has gone since I last wrote in this journal, but I have had no time for such writing. The Prime Minister has just sent in his resignation, and I have accepted it with calm. I excel in saying "adieu." I never wish persons to remain where they are restless or dissatisfied; or, as it sometimes happens, when work, or duty, or destiny calls them away. For this reason, I am called heartless, and it is wondered that I keep anyone attached to me.

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I wonder whether I shall ever meet Feldershey again? We are, I suppose, as likely *not* to meet as to meet—although he writes to me occasionally, and I reply. One can never grow accustomed to the strangeness of life—which is not strangeness half the time, but *ordinariness*, did we think of it quietly. I have long suspected, and during the last few months I have been convinced, that there is no peace to be found except in an utter detachment from all individuals and all things. I cannot succeed in acquiring this desirable indifference: still, I am making some progress. It is believed that I enjoy my position extremely; that I do not see the hollowness, vanity, wickedness, and stupidity of my court circle, or the mental, if not the commercial, dishonesty of my politicians. I know it well: very little escapes me. On the other hand, I never mistook ~~Sc~~uria for Paradise or my advisers for saints. They have urged me to marry ever since my accession, and it is difficult to find fault with some of the princes suggested. I am not so foolish as to regard a State-arranged marriage in any romantic light, and, just as I looked for no pleasure in ruling over this country, I do not pretend that there is any happiness for me in making a political treaty by means of a nuptial

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Mass. Is it surprising that I should wish to postpone as long as possible a humiliation which I must smile at—if only for the sake of my unfortunate ally? At present, I am accused of caring too much for men who are ineligible although they are well born and distinguished. Observers should understand that it is just because these men never could be cast for the disagreeable rôle of my prince consort that I am grateful for their friendship. To shut myself up alone with women is out of the question: to be sane one must mix constantly with both sexes. A man who lives almost wholly among men soon becomes more hysterical than any woman, or else more brutal than any beast; and a woman who spends her days with other women only soon becomes a tyrant or an imbecile. I am commended for my vivacity, my dancing, my riding, my conversation, my good looks, and my taste in dress. Alas! there are hundreds of poor girls among my subjects who are much prettier than I am, and if they had my gowns, my jewels, and my environment, they would pass for goddesses. And when obscure honest men, who will work for them and support them, tell them that they love them, they can be sure that the love is true; whereas I must ever doubt every word that is said to me. But my

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life is full of interest, excitements, and events: I have no opportunity to analyse my emotions or to brood over my ideas. It is to me quite clear that if the majority of healthy persons were perpetually unhappy, disappointed, or discontented, the whole order of living would have to change. The majority are, on the whole, disposed to think that all ends well that ends pretty well. It may be more fastidious to stand apart and complain: it may show a higher type of mind (I am not so sure about that—there is often a sinister side to much sublime thinking): it is certainly not normal, and this particular world is emphatically for the normal creature. It is true, all the same, that the most corrupt natures have a certain longing to idealise the hideous, and if they cannot understand the best idealism, they will take it in cheap, or gratesque, or false forms. Hence the success of so-called vulgar sentimentality. But although it is vulgar, I see that it is a veil: its intention is to hide the universal misgivings of mankind. How my people would laugh if they could read these sombre reflections! They do not know that I have been sombre ever since I received my first offer of marriage—the one from Feldershey. I think it would have sobered any girl who had the least sensitiveness.

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Love—he never mentioned : life—he never hinted at : responsibilities—he had not even considered. He may not be vain, but I think he felt very sure of my affection for him. When I ask myself why I laughed at his proposal—which he made, I must own, in a charming manner—I know it was because I was so frozen and grieved by his flippancy. He would have taken my heart, my soul, and my body as one takes the odd tricks in a game. I felt humiliated.

“Why, pray,” asked that silly Baroness D’Albreuse, “should you give him your heart, your soul, and your body? He never expected so much: ‘Yes’ and your cheek to kiss would have been quite sufficient.”

But she does not see that a man who expected so little would get still less from me, and a man who thought I had no more to give could neither love me nor be able to call out the smallest spark of love from me. I should pity myself if I ever loved Feldershey—for he has an earnest expression and incurably trivial feelings.

Nov. 14.—I am urged to find my happiness in my position. They always tell me that; but what is my position? Is it to be my one companion, my one refuge, my one solace for the fatigues of existence, and my one compensation for missing everything else

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in life? It is not enough—oh no, it is not enough. People who pretend to think so are not alive. They have manners and clothes, they can talk and they can walk; but they don't live, and they cannot love. The difference between us is this: I do live, I can't help living, and I might love—if I could find any reasonable excuse for a great affection.

This morning the Chancellor Verneuil sat at my left during luncheon, the Grand-Duke Constantine was on my right, and the conversation turned on friendship. Verneuil will never assume the burden of an original remark, and every sentence he utters is from some book. Following his custom, he observed on being appealed to—

“Montaigne has said very admirably, speaking of a friend, ‘If absence be pleasing or beneficial to him, it is much more pleasing to me than his presence, and that may not properly be called absence where means and ways may be found to communicate with one another. We add to the benefit, and extend the possession of life, by being divided and far apart. Being together, one party was idle: we confounded one another. The separation of the place made the conjunction of our minds and wills the richer.’”

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The grand-duke yawned with his eyes, and swallowed half a glass of Moselle :

"That," said he, "is the language of cynical, egoistic middle-age: it does not express the sentiments of one-and-twenty."

I agreed with him, and if his profile had been better, I should have said so. But as he has a receding chin, and eyebrows which dart into the bridge of his nose, I pretended to support Verneuil, and I spoke beautifully about the delights of solitude. As a matter of fact, it kills me.

Dec. 3.—My new diamond crown is beyond all my hopes a success, and I danced round my room like a madwoman when I saw it. How these so-called trifles improve one's appearance!

Dec. 15.—I have tried my best to admire the Emperor's nephew, Prince Charles de Joyeuse. He had been warned that my tastes were solemn, and, when we first met he might have passed for the talking Catalogue of the Vatican Museum. By degrees he has become more human; still, it is quite indifferent to me whether Goethe or Schiller is the greater poet, or whether Rembrandt is superior to Rubens. All such questions are well enough in the evening; but when one has to raise a loan for the new Treasury

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Buildings, and the people are complaining of the Army Tax, one is bound to lose one's enthusiasm for the fine arts. I encourage them, of course, because it is necessary to keep the nation good-humoured; and music, pictures, literature, sports, and the drama are the best distractions when trade is bad and war is threatening. The prince leaves us tomorrow, and I do not think he will come again to Siguria. Our climate does not suit all constitutions.

Jan. 15.—Another year begins, and I have had a letter from Feldershey. He asks how a woman can have at once coldness and charm; a vivacious air and a placid temperament; amazing naturalness and the most complicated artificiality; absolute self-command and yet spontaneous manners. "Your idol in this world," he says, "is Reason, and your ruling passion is your pride. You never forget yourself: you are capable of deep seriousness and also capable of the most ironic *badinage*: you excel in sarcasm: there is nothing more caressing than your sympathy. Yet, all the time, there is this *Me*—wrapped in the proudest self-esteem, and inaccessible to any considerations which are not commended by the dry and prudent. I detest such prudence, and as for your cleverness, while one may admire, one cannot

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love a *bel esprit*." I was foolish enough to cry over this unjust letter. When I think that I was born impatient, headstrong, and impulsive, and that Feldershey has been always too blind to see my real nature, I want to laugh and weep at the same moment. Often, when I have been weary, desperate, ill, rebellious, I have felt inclined to find absurdity in all the safe ideas. Yet I have put on the most serene smile, spoken in the gentlest tones, and insisted on the pleasures of a conventional life. Few things are so full of mockery as virtue, and if those who cannot maintain it have to endure a certain open contempt, those who remain steadfast often break their hearts in secret. Such is my terror of being called a prude that I have committed many indiscretions, and given the gossips every opportunity to abuse me. Yet I suppose they know—for their inquisitiveness is indefatigable—that I have no painful secrets. They do not forgive this, and Feldershey himself racks his mind to find some other cause—than a desire to live honourably—in my views of love and marriage. If I wore grim clothes, sat in church all day, never laughed, never joked, never danced, and never spoke to men, they might perhaps call me dull, and ask God to bless me. But my passion for all that is beautiful and amusing

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baffles the hypocrites and annoys the desperate—because I really seem to enjoy myself without paying the penalties usually associated with every form of pleasure or gaiety.

Jan. 25th.—The most astute are bewildered, and the most cunning are foiled, by a policy of disinterestedness. I am called calculating, a *fine mouche*, a schemer, and one who plays my cards well. They think that I sit by my fireside imagining designs which 'work out with extraordinary advantage to myself. If I had interfered with my destiny—such as it is—it would have been a long chain of disasters; but I have left it to Providence. I have never, in my life, taken the trouble to intrigue; and I have never known intrigues to produce a success which would not have happened in the ordinary course of events. To be sure, I follow many of my impulses, because I have always found that after much reflection I reach my original decision, which came without any reflection at all. I have not yet answered Eldershey's letter, because the mist between us cannot be cleared away by words. Once, long ago, I remember saying to him—

“How many women have you loved better than me?”

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"You have always held your own from the beginning," said he.

"What do you call *my own*?" I asked.

"The best of me, of course," he answered, with that ingenuousness which he sometimes shows.

"What is the *best* of you?" said I.

"My affection for you."

"Oh, you have an affection for me?"

"Isn't that clear by this time? What is the use of saying to a woman, 'I love you'? She knows it. You know it."

"I do not," I said. His notion of love and mine were not the same. This is why there was often a silent battle between us. Mopsle is right, although she is euphemistic. My cheek to kiss was something he could understand: he would have called all my ideas of devotion ridiculous, exacting, and uncomfortable. What a cruel world it would be if women loved men in no better way than so many men love women. We have to redeem them from their own crudity: it is certain that they could never redeem us from any degree of barbarism.

April 14.—I intended to destroy this journal, but I will keep it—if only to remind myself how one changes. In some respects, however, I have not

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changed. I might express myself differently now, but there is always the same self to express. I see that so long as one can exercise outward self-mastery, one is accused of frigid egoism and bleakness of character. The temptations which are overcome, the interior contests and struggles count for nothing, and are unimaginable to those who follow every caprice and yield to every persuasion. Few have the generosity to acknowledge that, although high standards of conduct make for peace in the ultimate resource, the long discipline between the beginning and the end is forbidding, forlorn, and so severe that one is usually too weary to care much for the very thing one has striven for, and perhaps gained. The truth is that one is encouraged almost entirely by the far worse condition and disappointments of those who disregard the standards; for, if the souls who struggle against temptations are unhappy, those who succumb to them are incomparably more so. But this is the end of journal-keeping. I am not yet twenty-three, and I feel older than the hills. Too much has been crowded into my life: there have been too many vicissitudes, too many changes; and things I have not experienced myself, I have inherited, I believe, from my father, who was first a philosopher,

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then a saint, then (so I am told) a libertine, and finally a butcher, or, as he is described on his tombstone, an illustrious descendant of the Emperor Charles v. He was certainly a brave soldier, and he perished violently at twenty-six. He left me a .evolution, his knowledge of the world, and the price of two hundred thousand masses for his soul. No doubt, I am serious beyond my years.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHICH ILLUSTRATES THE NECESSITY OF HEARING
BOTH SIDES OF A GRIEVANCE

WHILE Margaret was reading her journal, Feldershey, in his saloon, was sorting out some papers in his despatch box. He had not opened this box since his return from the campaign against the rebels, and he now intended to destroy the letters which he had addressed to his mother and his wife in the event of his falling in action. He tore, without glancing through it, the letter to his mother, and scattered the pieces out of the railway carriage window. The letter to Margaret was long, much erased, and corrected.

"What on earth did I say?" he thought, and he broke the seal. This was what he had said:—

"MY DEAR MARGARET,—This will be a hard thing to write, but I must tell you what I think

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of you, because I may never return; and although I don't see much use in explanations and all that sort of thing, it might be a satisfaction to you, as you are so analytic, to know my point of view if I can possibly make it plain. Probably I shan't, and you will put on your usual air, which can mean much or nothing. I don't say that unkindly, but it is true. You are too subtle and peculiar for words: I admire your character in many ways (as you know), and if I could study you from the distance, I should content myself by saying that no other woman can touch you. But we have got beyond that stage, and I have to pull myself up and ask myself what is going to happen. I did not fall in love with you at first sight. (The days when you were a child do not count. I never saw a prettier child or a more tiresome one. That was not altogether your fault, as you were so spoilt and made so much of by everybody.) You interested me enormously when you were eighteen, but I hope you will not think I was quite such a fool as to suppose that you took any especial interest in me. I did not lose my head, and I was perfectly contented to be one of your numerous friends. I thought you had far too many men friends for a young girl, but it was not my business, and, in

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any case, I blamed your relations more than I blamed you. I have been in love several times in the course of my life. You may have heard this from others, but no one except myself could tell you how much these affairs cut into me. I won't lie to myself, and I can't say that I am sentimental. Still, I have been on the verge of blowing out my brains for two very exceptional women, and one utterly worthless one—whom I am ashamed to remember. The one I loved best died; the other one, who was brilliant and handsome, and a wonderful personality, was married; the last was pretty, and clever, and artistic, and half-mad, and no good. I would have made any sacrifice for her, and I gave up many years to her. She was impossible, and I must have been as mad as she is when I liked her. I don't hate her now, but she bores me, and her tricks and airs and graces simply get on my nerves. Of course, you won't really like hearing this, although I have made it short and toned it down, and left out a lot of passing fancies which I always knew were fancies. These three affairs I am now speaking of were not fancies, they were quite genuine, and it is by them that I am able to test my affection for you. You stand quite apart, and you came into my life in a way of your own. Although

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you did not care for me, you managed somehow to lead me on in spite of my better judgment and my common sense. There was never any love-making—but it was not a humdrum friendship. It was most absorbing, and it was like nothing in my experience. I dislike reminding you of the contradictory remarks you have made, and continue to make, but in one day you said, at five o'clock, 'Yes, I do love you,' and at half-past five you said, 'I wish I could love you. Looking back, I see that I may have egged you on, but I must confess that I like to know where I am, and every man would say the same. In other moods, you are cautious and almost prudish, and you might be any age from sixteen to sixty—you are such a mixture of sedateness and the devil. Frankly, I have often thought you were capable of anything, and half the time I can't make up my mind whether you are so innocent that it is almost inconceivable that anybody alive could be so innocent, or so deceitful that you would fool the very elect. When I am tempted to believe that you are deceitful, I feel as though I were going out of my mind. I keep telling myself that I am wrong, and I get quite satisfied for a time till something happens, or you make some remark which hits me through and through with

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every sort of doubt. We could not have gone on like this. You won't receive this letter unless I am done for during the skirmish, but if I am done for, I shall never call it a proper solution of the misery we have caused each other. It is all very well to laugh it off, but we need not keep up that farce at this moment. Even if you do not care for me, I know that you are disappointed in me, and I have told you that my feelings about you are very strange. I can't describe them. I choke if I try to describe them, so there is no use reeling off stuff which isn't *it*. I love you, and you may as well know it, because the love is not of my own choosing, and I have taken pride in crushing it down. I swear, I will not be weak. The love has little to do with your presence or your absence—I have learnt that much. I have often thought it absolutely hellish to be with you, and I have been almost glad to leave you and lose sight of you. That will show you how small a part the actual personal element of sex plays in my devotion to you. But I don't deny for a minute that I have been superbly happy with you many times. You can be most fascinating when you choose and when you least know it. I am writing as though it were not my last letter to you. I want to blame myself for everything. It is awful

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to write like this. At the back of my head, I believe you have treated me badly. Perhaps you cannot help being insincere—your life has made you artificial and selfish. As you are shallow yourself, you do not consider the depths in other people. But what I condemn you for is this: you use those depths for your own ends, or your own amusement, or your own convenience. With you, it is *Et puis, bon jour!* in return for the use of a soul. (That is like one of your own remarks. I daresay you said it to me once. Quite likely.) I won't reproach you. Life itself will do that. What I grieve over is the thought that it all so easily might have been different! Or do we each, as mortals, have periods of blindness, and see each other and ourselves as we are not, and could never be? In that case, we are indeed the sport of the gods. Self-deceived and the deceivers of others, we play our part in a tragi-comedy, and perish. But whatever love is felt is felt necessarily, I am sure, and what is *not* felt, cannot possibly *be* felt. Good-bye, dearest Margaret. Some of the past, so far as I speak for myself, was at least a *beau rêve*. F."

Feldershey read this, and said—

"I thought it so when I wrote it. I meant every

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word. I'll show it to her some day when we are happy!"

So he sealed it up afresh, and replaced it in his despatch box.

CHAPTER XXV

THE EFFECT OF LOVE-SONGS AND VINEGAR ON THE HEART

THEY reached Venice about nine o'clock in the evening, and the magic of that city made them silent. They sat in their gondola and were rowed down the Grand Canal, under the stars, and past the dark palaces to the lagoon. Feldershey's studio was near the public gardens, where there were few lights and not another gondola to be seen. The loneliness was not loneliness to Margaret: she was weary of crowds, and noise, and parade. Feldershey, when the gondoliers halted, helped her out on to the stone steps of his home, and opened its heavy carved door with his latch-key. She smiled at the strangeness of the experience: they had both been obliged to work against such elaborate complications in order to attain to this simplicity.

"Your mother has transformed the place," she said

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looking round in astonishment: "how charming! how perfect!"

"Women transform everything," answered Feldershey: "my mother has changed the rooms, and you have changed most of my ideas. Now—we ourselves must change. I want you to be happy here—I want to be happy here myself."

There were two piles of letters and telegrams on the table.

"Congratulations!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Evidently!"

She read several—till she came to a fifth, which sent a wave of colour into her cheeks.

"I may as well tell you," she said; "this is from Rixensart. He is in Venice. I suppose he has come to quarrel with you."

"A quarrel with Rixensart might be an excellent thing for all of us," said Feldershey irritably.

Margaret concealed her agitation:—

"I don't agree. I am not jealous, as you know, but why should two men risk their lives for a woman like Bertha?"

"I'm very sorry that you saw me kiss her. The kiss means nothing."

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"Then why kiss? Why let her think you wanted to kiss her? Why want to kiss her?"

"I was just saying good-bye—and she was unhappy. In reality, she bored me."

"There was nothing in your manner which conveyed anything of the kind," said Margaret, beginning to laugh.

"That is the Feldershey way. When we care, we don't *make* love—we love!"

"And you don't show your boredom—you kiss! That must be another Feldershey way. All the same, I can't be miserable because of your lapse into the second Feldershey manner. I'm quite happy—at least, I'd rather be unhappy here, hoping to hear Pan play, than unhappy out there"—she waved her hand in the imaginary direction of Siguria—"where, if he played, he would never be heard!" Her voice broke, but there were no tears in her eyes. She had exhausted all her tears during the war. Beyond a certain and fixed extreme degree, the capacity for feeling would seem to cease: the heart becomes stupefied by its own pain, and nothing any more can hurt it. Margaret was surprised at her own calm, which resembled in no way the calm of pride nor the calm of indifference: she still loved

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Feldershey, but he had lost his power to wound and grieve her.

"What a magnificent night!" said Feldershey, looking out of the window. "Why can't one see the moon without swearing at it, about it, or by it? We can dine at Danielli's. It is not so lonely there."

"I am not lonely, thank you," she answered. Two singers, playing on mandolines, passed in a gondola, and Feldershey leaned over the balcony to hear their song. It was a very old one, but it pleased him. When he turned round, he saw Margaret unpacking the little silver saucepans and a kettle from her luncheon basket.

"I was taught to use these things when I was a girl," she explained.

"The photographs!" said he: "'The Princess Margaret preparing a Workman's Dinner!'"

"Formerly, I cooked the dinner, but there was no workman. Now there is a workman."

"Take care!" said Feldershey hastily; "just look at your hand. It is covered with flour and spirits of wine."

"Please don't watch me. You make me nervous. Suppose we skip the soup and have salad? Do you prefer white vinegar or red."

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"D——n the vinegar!"

"Consider it damned!" she said gently.

"You can't do this. It's childish. It is out of the question. I won't have it. I can't see you in this barrack, this grotesque discomfort"—

"I thought you found it so delightful?"

"I was determined to find it delightful."

"Then I can be determined too," said the princess, cutting the bread. But she allowed him to push away the basket, and close its cover, and strap it down, as though its contents were all the devils of Pandora's box.

"Margaret," he exclaimed, "this intolerable strain can't go on. We have kept it up too long—it can't go on!"

"What is to be done, then?"

She loosened her cloak, and sat down on the rug by the log fire; for there was a chilliness in the night, air, or else in her own soul.

"We must come to some understanding. We cannot go on as we are. Remember when you came here that day—and—and— Well, that day I asked myself why you should pretend to care for me."

"Pretend!"

"Yes, pretend! I had to find a reason—and I

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found it. Do you hear? I found it. You had a motive."

"Certainly. I told you I was desperate—I begged you to help me. You did help me, and I'm grateful."

"I hate gratitude—I don't want it."

"Then what do you want?"

"I want your love," he said quietly.

"I thought," she answered, after a pause, "that you merely wanted your own way!"

"No: I want you."

"Well, I am here."

"Yes, you sit there, but in reality we are leagues apart—not a step nearer than we were when we last met here after five years' silence."

"Whose fault is that?"

"Remember how I had loved you! I used to work away, always alone, in this old room. I painted that picture of Pan, hoping all the time that some day you would see it—and understand. I said to myself, 'When she sees it, it will tell her all the things I am too blundering to say.' And then—when you came"—

"Yes, when I came," said Margaret, "why were you so rude?"

"Was I rude?"

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"Monstrously rude. But you are always rude—now."

"Am I?"

"Detestable. At Berkeley, you would have left everything just to play croquet with me. Is there any croquet here?"

"Oh, do be serious!" said Feldershey.

"Serious—again? Not for worlds."

Feldershey disliked her frivolous mood:

"I wish I'd been shot up there—in the hills!" he exclaimed.

"Don't say that. But, can't you see that I too am disappointed? On the day of our marriage, when you said such strange things to me—you hurt me. Perhaps you don't believe me; well—it doesn't matter much. I'm a proud woman. If any one saw me now, they would never call me proud again. I am too wretched to care about pride—it is better to be natural."

"I've been to blame. I have been brutal," said Feldershey eagerly: "I know it. I deserve no consideration from you. But you wouldn't give me any explanation—you wouldn't tell me the truth."

"What truth? What are you talking about? I have always shown surely my—affection—for you;

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but you—if you have any affection for me—you keep it under. You distrust it.”

“Because it means so much more to me than anything else would mean. You could absorb my thoughts, my life, my soul, if only you would—oh, Margaret, don’t let us lose our happiness; for we could be so happy if”—

Some strong touch on the door bell set a peal ringing through the rooms.

“That was the bell!” said Margaret.

“Let it ring!” said Feldershey.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHICH DESCRIBES THE *FROU-FROU* OF A SKIRT
AND THE PIPING OF A GOD *

THE small person whose nervous but firm hand was operating on the bell wore a long silk motor coat and a thick motor veil. She rang until Feldershey opened the door, whereupon she rushed past him and threw herself, uttering terms of extravagant endearment, upon Margaret.

"Save me!" she exclaimed, and the voice was Bertha's, "save me! I'll never do it again. Don't give me away! Back me up."

Her cousin met this appeal with cold interest:

"What is the matter?"

"I left Siguria on Mr. Baverstock's motor—we went together. The motor went very fast *while* it went, but, suddenly, it stopped! Something got on fire, and although we drenched the machinery with all our Apollinaris, it went wrong. We had to wait for hours by the side of a dry ditch till a cart came

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by. Then we got a slow train, and travelled with eight in the compartment. I haven't taken my hat off since we started three days ago—and I haven't had a proper meal." Here she sobbed.

"And where is Baverstock?" asked Margaret.

"He has caught a chill. He is ill in bed at Danielli's. The doctor won't let him get up. I think he is off his head."

"And why did you come with Baverstock?" said Feldershey.

Bertha began to wriggle in her clothes: she pulled at her veil: she sought for her pocket-handkerchief.

"I may as well tell you," she stammered. "Harry and I decided to do 'the big thing,' as he calls it, and make a bolt! I didn't realise in the least what he fully meant. I thought it was *badinage*."

"Strange *badinage*!" observed Feldershey drily.

"After the motor broke down," continued the artless creature, "I came to my senses, and I saw it wasn't good enough. These great sacrifices are *such* a mistake."

"Then you saw that there was a sacrifice underlying Harry's humour?" said Feldershey.

"I'm only silly," said Bertha, ignoring him and beseeching Margaret; "there's no harm in me really."

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You warned poor Harry. The day you met him here you said I wasn't to be trusted. He told me so."

Feldershey turned to Margaret:

"What day did you meet him here?"

"On the day you lent him this studio for half an hour!" said Margaret.

"He asked me to meet him here. Margaret found it out, came instead, and made a frightful row. Didn't you, darling?" said Bertha.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Feldershey, inwardly cursing himself as a fool.

"I have wired to Frederic—'*Margaret wants me. Am en route Venice.*' That seemed the simplest thing," said Bertha. "And you'll both stand by me, won't you?"

"Now I understand Rixensart's telegram," said Margaret to Feldershey.

Bertha took off her cloak, and stood before them as neat a little figure as ever, with a smooth tight bodice, and a tiny waist, and any number of silk flounces round her under-petticoat, which rustled and swished and swayed as she moved toward the looking-glass.

But Margaret noticed a fine row of pearls on Bertha's neck.

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"Mine!" she cried, without thinking.

Bertha opened her eyes:—

"As Harry paid so much for them," she said, "and sent the cheque for the children's feast after your wedding, he gave the pearls to me. You really wouldn't expect him to give you the pearls back again! And the price went far beyond their market value—although you had the cheque punctually to the very minute, without discount."

Margaret thought she caught the words "Ignoble spirit," muttered through Feldershey's closed teeth.

"So *Bertha* is *Baverstock's* lady!" he said presently.

"Did you never guess that?" asked Margaret: "I was always afraid you would!"

Bertha, who was organically tactful, strolled away toward the inner rooms.

"Margaret," said Feldershey, "you have beaten me in generosity at every point. If you have any spark of affection still left for me, forgive me. I hate myself. I have been a fool. Leave it at that. I've been wrong. I have been suffering from sleeplessness!"

"Perhaps," said Margaret thoughtfully, "that is the third Feldershey way. You don't make love—you love: you kiss when you are bored: when you are wrong, it is because you are suffering from insomnia!"

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Before he could make any reply, they both heard most distinctly the first bars of the Wedding March in *Lohengrin* being played on a curious reedy instrument.

"Did you hear anything?" said Margaret.

"Yes—I heard"—

"We both heard"— The tune went on: the two lovers, in bewilderment, joined hands, and followed the sound till they traced it to the statuette of Pan which the students had mended.

"It is the clock!" shouted Feldershey.

"It is Pan playing for us—it is the flute playing for you, and perhaps for me!" said Margaret.

Bertha peered round the doorway, and she fell to real whimpering at the sight of the two lost creatures at last in each other's arms. She was never again quite so light-minded, and her laugh was ever afterwards more kind.

"There is such a thing as true love," she would say: "I have seen an instance of it with my own eyes!"

Feldershey and Margaret did not remain in Venice. Sigurian affairs became tragical once more, and the Government, speaking through Prince Adolf and

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Count Rixensart, implored Lord Feldershey to take again command of the turbulent army. By the unanimous vote of both Senate Houses and all the people, he was elected President. "To lead men," said they, "we must have a man." The princess saw in this proclamation the ample reward for her courageous experiment. Feldershey could refuse her nothing, and, much as he detested responsibility, he accepted the Presidentship, which meant nothing less than working for eighteen hours, as a rule, out of the twenty-four.

But the statue of Pan now stands on a marble pedestal in the centre of the courtyard of the palace, and when the military band is not playing, it is possible to hear the sweet piping of Pan's flute. Thus, the day's work does not seem so hard.

November 1900—August 1904.

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